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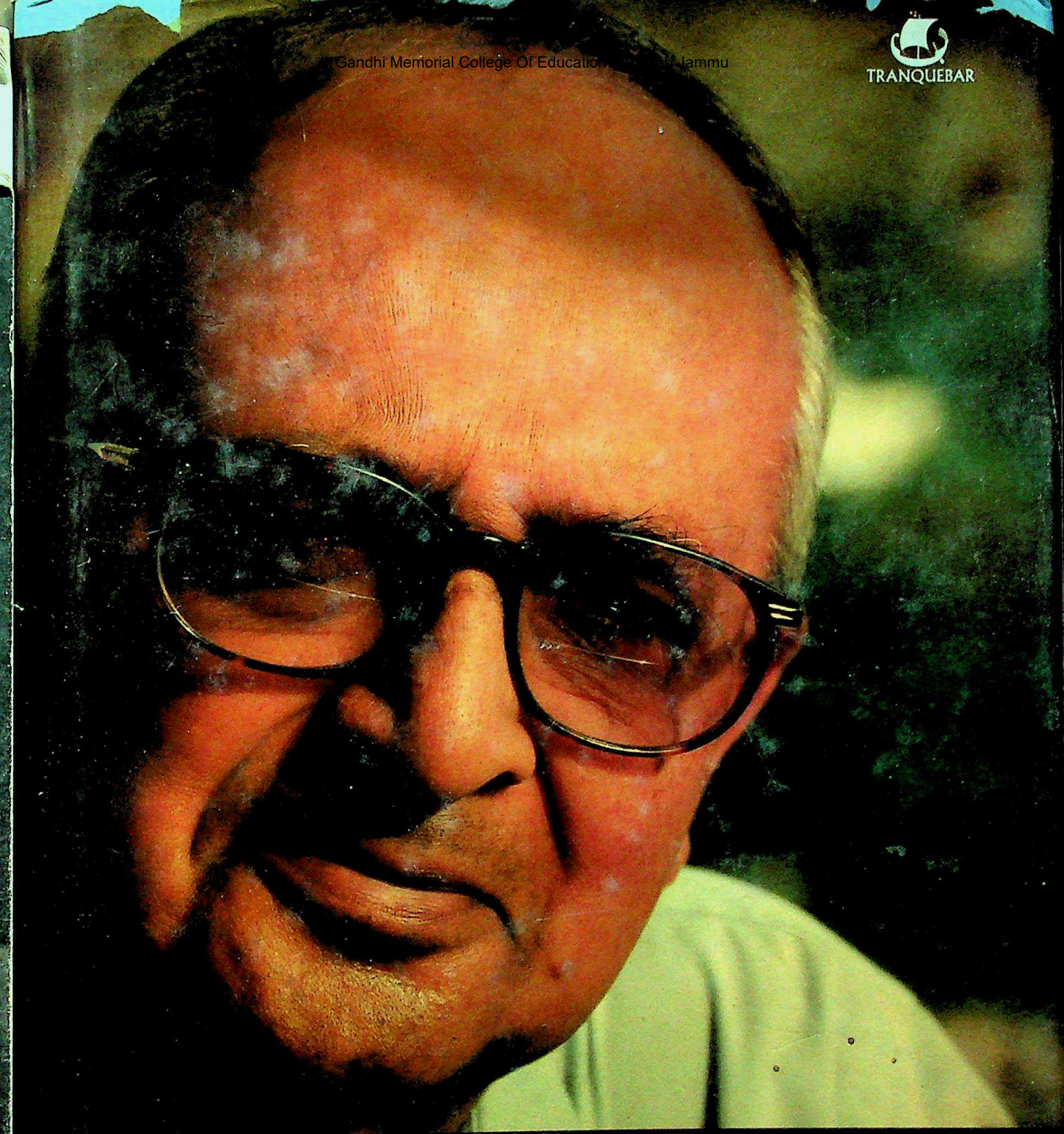
TRANQUEBAR



FIRST DRAFT

WITNESS TO THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIA

B.G. VERGHESE

The President signed the order declaring the emergency at about 7-00 on Thursday morning.

Opposition MPs meet President

Earlier, the Cabinet met at 6 a.m. and considered the situation and approved the recommendation to the President for the declaration of me

New Gujarat Assembly meets today

Cabinet committee reviews situation

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MINISTER
INFORMATION & BROADCASTING
INDIA.

Personal.

Camp: Coimbatore.
June 20, 1965.

Dear Shri Verghese,

When we met last, I talked to you of my difficulty in reorganising some of the departments of my Ministry and especially of finding a person suitable for the pst of Principal Information Officer. You promised to think over the matter and to let me know if any name suggested itself. I am wondering if you yourself would be interested in the post on a temporary basis - say a year to begin with.

Will you give this proposal your serious consideration? Government salaries are not, as you probably know, as high as those paid outside, but I am told the position is one of prestige, to which your own personality will add dignity and greater efficacy. I can make an effort to see if Finance and our rules will allow me to increase the salary especially as you would be with us on a contract basis, but am not sure of the Finance Minister's reaction, although I know that he approves of you as a person - which is a compliment received by very few!!

I have not mentioned this matter to anyone and I do not even know the official reaction, but I thought I would get your views first. I should be grateful if you would keep this to yourself.

You have been doing an excellent job by your constructive and impartial reporting of our development projects. I have just been reading reviews of the book containing a collection of your articles and am looking forward to acquiring copies not only for myself but to send to interested people abroad.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Indira Gandhi

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46 Pali Hill, Bandra
Bombay 400050
7 August 1975

Dear George,

I was delighted to see that you had received the Magsaysay Award. It has come at a very appropriate time, as a vindication of your "errors". My sincerest congratulations.

Yours
Salim
(Salim Ali)

Shri B.G.Verghese
Editor: The Hindustan Times
New Delhi

GOVERNOR
ASSAM

RAJ BHAVAN
SHILLONG

December 20, 1971.

My dear George,

Many thanks for sending me the photographs, one of which I am sending to the Nawab.

Thank you also for the two editorials enclosed with both of which, as usual, I agree. Not having your facility of expression nor mastery of the facts, I have been contenting myself with repeating to all and sundry the basic explanation for the American stance which is that Nixon is a bastard.

Long live Bangla Desh! Long live Indira Gandhi!

Yours sincerely,
(B.K. Nehru)

Shri B.G. Verghese,
The Hindustan Times,
Post Box No.40,
New Delhi-1

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FIRST DRAFT

Witness to the Making of Modern India

B. G. VERGHESE

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
Acc. No. 10397
Dated 4.4.12

1 (I)

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To Jamila, who shared this journey and lent fragrance to it with the trademark flower in her hair; to Vijay and Bina, Rahul and Jamuna, who might be amused and, perhaps, even instructed by this narrative that they encouraged me to write; and to Kanishk, Diya and Naina, who will inherit the Modern India their grandparents and parents leave behind.

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— 'The Truth Behind Rabat', 27 September, 1969
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— 'A Merger is Arranged', 17 April 1974
— 'The Hour of Decision', Sunday Magazine, 24 March 1974
— 'The Road to Recovery', Sunday Magazine, 31 March 1974
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— 23 May 1983, editorial on Indira Gandhi's remarks on Maneka Gandhi
— 15 June 1984, editorial on White Paper on Punjab, commenting on Bhindranwale
— 1 November 1984, editorial on Indira Gandhi's assassination, 'Indira and India'
— 1 November 1984, editorial on outbreak of violence against Sikhs after Indira Gandhi's assassination
— 2 November 1984, editorial on Sikh violence, 'Cry Beloved Country'
— June 1987, article on Eelam offences in Tamil Nadu
— 13 March 1987, letter written by President Zail Singh to Rajiv Gandhi on the discord between them
— March 1991, editorial on desecration of Hindu shrines in Kashmir
— July 1991, article entitled 'Another Tryst With Destiny'

The article 'The Candidate' was first published in the *IIC Quarterly*, Vol 4, No. 2, 1977 (April 1977); the extracts from the article 'Poetic Licence; first appeared in *Outlook* Magazine, issue dated 5 July 1999; the extracts from P.M. Tandon's diaries have been reproduced with the permission of Konark Publishers *(PMO Diary*, Vol. 1, 'Prelude to the Emergency', pub. 2003; Vol. II ' The Emergency', pub. 2006); quotations by Dhirendra Sharma have been extracted from *The Janata (People's) Struggle* published by Philosophy and Social Action, 1977.

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Note on Spellings: Over the years, the names of certain places—cities, towns and geographical regions—have been changed for various reasons. In the course of this narrative, we follow the practice of referring to a place, in a particular context, by whichever name it was known at the time.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The patience of my wife and sons and their families while I mentally locked myself away writing this tome (albeit largely with their encouragement if not at their insistence) will, I hope, be rewarded by the outcome. I must, however, thank them for their forbearance.

Titles were tested out and Vijay, in particular, advised with useful dos and don'ts from distant Hong Kong and undertook to do some preliminary designing for the cover.

Kamaljit Kumar and Gopal at the CPR library were most helpful in locating references and in many other ways. So also Sushma Zutshi, Chief Librarian, and her colleagues at the IIC.

I have quoted from my old articles and other writings that appeared in various newspapers, journals, reports, memos and books over the years. Though these have been duly acknowledged in the text, I would like, once again, to proffer my thanks to the original publications and all the colleagues there with whom I worked.

I am greatly indebted for the narrative of my genealogy to Wing Commander K. Verghese (retired), an uncle, who painstakingly pieced together the family history and drew an elaborate family tree in his book, *The Karakkal Kozhimannil Family*, privately published in 1994.

For some childhood recollections, I have also relied on *A Brief Memoir* by my sister, Rebecca (Meenu), written around 2000.

Finally, I must acknowledge Westland for publishing the volume. Its chief editor, Renuka Chatterjee, was always encouraging and supportive from her perch in Delhi. In Bangalore, Veena Seshadri remains an as yet unseen but meticulous copy-editor who patiently steered me towards tidying up the manuscript, cutting out fat, spotting errors, excising repetitions and insisting on reader-friendly prose when jargon intruded. Thank you.

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PREFACE

It takes ego to write an autobiography and honesty to get it anywhere near right. The one is often in excess and the other in short supply. But why should anyone be interested in reading about another's life, barring that of the good and the great who are, in any case, otherwise remembered? But interesting times are also, perhaps, worth recording as lived history, especially for family and friends, and possibly even for others, who might relish nostalgia and glean something of value from a worm's eye view of shared experience.

First Draft, a memoir spanning more than the Biblical threescore years and ten or even fourscore, encompasses many eras—the heyday of colonialism and its end; the Second World War; the Partition of India that witnessed the greatest and bloodiest single interconnected migration that the world has ever seen; miracles of science ranging from the splitting of the atom to the cornucopia of wonders unleashed by the invention of the integrated chip and genetic engineering; the population boom; the moon landing; the rise and fall of Imperialism, Fascism and Communism; the coming of the global village; the Age of Terror; and climate change.

All of this left a mark on India as it struggled to mould an ancient, traditional civilisation into a modern state and to overcome poverty and inequality through a uniquely sequenced experiment in democracy. As a callow youth, I was cocooned from the political ferment of the times. Later, as a journalist, I was there, witness to the creation of a new modern India, writing my first draft of history, hurried and incomplete though it might have been.

I did not maintain a diary except for a few years while in the Prime Minister's Office; but my own newspaper writings constitute a vivid running commentary spanning more than six decades. This volume,

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however, is no more than a highly selective account of the times of my life, a personal history replete with errors and exceptions. It does not pretend to be anything more. This is instant—not even contemporary—history as seen through the eyes of an individual reporter and columnist, whether any or all of what was happening was fully or accurately perceived, and what was forecast did, or did not, in fact ensue. It is not the collective expression of many minds distilled by a historian in the light of hindsight and knowledge. Thus my reports and reflections from day to day were my story, a worm's eye view of the world as it passed me by.

Not everything was recorded even then, and even less has been now recalled—perhaps, only the salient events, signposts and milestones along the way. The selection is subjective, and concerns events and trends as perceived through personal experience and encounters during my youth and working life. In connecting the dots, I have drawn a picture, incomplete and erratic as it might be. But that is the picture I carry.

The story may appear disjointed as a particular narrative is dropped or edged out by another, only to be resumed later, the intervening period being summarised to pull together the threads, in order to restore continuity. This may be unsatisfactory from one point of view. But the journalist, unlike the historian, cannot compress time into convenient eras. Numerous triumphs, crises and cross-currents intrude when they will and are recorded concurrently, each influencing the other. And so the story goes back and forth. Where necessary, however, I have taken the narrative up to a convenient resting point. Unlike the historian, the journalist has a deadline. He must write or let his thoughts perish. He does not have the time to look back and carefully evaluate what happened and why, before filing his copy. He reports whatever happens as it happens and ventures to forecast the immediate future.

Although this is, in a manner of speaking, a history of India with a very little 'h', recording it as a continuing narrative serves a useful purpose. As a people, Indians have little sense of history. Official records are classified and secreted in archives and are made public most grudgingly, if ever. A long tradition of official secrecy inhibited the writing of memoirs reflecting on men and decisions that influenced the turn of events and shaped our lives. There is really no general history of India post-Independence barring Bipin Chandra, Aditya and Mridula Mukherjee's *India After Independence* (2000/2007) and Ramachandra Guha's *India After Gandhi* (2007). It is only in the past few years that school texts have gone beyond the framing of the Constitution to current times, but even this is largely taught as part of Political Science or Social Studies.

There has, however, been a good deal of writing on selected themes

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such as Partition, Kashmir, the Sino-Indian conflict, industrial policy, the Green Revolution, the Naxalite movement, economic reforms, the nuclear debate and so on. But these are fragmented and episodic and are not placed within the larger sweep of the nation's march of history. In consequence, many educated middle-aged Indians, including policy makers and opinion leaders, are astonishingly ill-informed about the context and background of seminal topics such as the Kashmir question, Siachen or the Indus Treaty, which are so heatedly debated. Earlier books on some of these topics have gone out of print and disappeared from library shelves. So there is a void outside and beyond the personal recollections of those who lived through these events. Much discussion is therefore superficial and lacks depth.

A further problem has arisen with the declassification of other national archives, especially those of Britain and the US, which bear on post-Independence India. Indian and international scholars using this material understandably see critical Indian events through foreign lenses that are not free from bias and partisanship. Chronologically following earlier publications, these narratives tend to eclipse Indian perspectives. This leaves the Indian point of view struggling to compete in the market-place of ideas. In this context, memoirs, howsoever incidentally, help bridge that knowledge gap in some degree. The national motto, Satyameva Jayate, proclaims that Truth Shall Prevail. Official policy has not always enabled that to happen . . .

On going through my files of clippings, I find what stands out interestingly is that 'history' repeats itself. I could reprint some of my old columns verbatim today, only changing names and dates, and yet appear totally contemporary. India so often seemed to be caught up in deep crises that threatened its very unity and integrity; but the nation pulled through every time, belying the prophets of doom. The actors and scene changed and the sutradhar (the columnist) intoned the same dire warnings, only to be falsified. Yes, opportunities were lost, a price was paid and progress was stalled, but the play went on. India showed tremendous resilience and corrective mechanisms were activated. This should not breed complacency or fatalism, but it nonetheless suggests that deeper processes and trends are at work, which superficial reporting does not uncover.

Perhaps pessimism stems from looking at events too narrowly, without the perspective of time and space. Problems are not always immediately soluble, nor are wrongs righted in the here and now, but only in the broader context of the give and take that is possible over time. This belief has imbued me with the optimism and hope that we can and,

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indeed, shall overcome. It has also encouraged me to look at the big picture of where we want to be, and then work backwards to determine the optimality of trade-offs and what it is that we must now do, or not do, in order to achieve that goal.

Generations pass. What was familiarly ordinary and everyday is forgotten, or only dimly perceived with the passage of time. This narrative has therefore tried to include fragments of social history recalled from times gone by, or as recounted by elders. I make no apology for subjectivity for this is as I saw things then, or see them now through the filter of time. Several of these are single-sentence snapshots of historic events and occasions that remain etched in memory. These include India's first Republic Day celebrations that I witnessed in Bombay, Man's first moon landing, the coming of the computer to India, the magic and mystery of the new millennium and various great and little happenings that transformed our lives.

I have dwelt at some little length on family and school because, more than we realise at that time, they shape our values and conduct. Both influences taught me the supremacy of moral authority and the principle that it is in giving that we receive. Also, I grew up as an Indian, ignorant of distinctions of caste, creed, language and region in a society that I was soon to discover was and, alas, is still plagued by these narrow distinctions. But my tribe grows.

I have enjoyed reliving my years and, barring very few things, would not wish that anything had happened differently. I have been ever more active since 'retirement'. Age is an attitude, least of all a biological attribute. My advice is: eat what you will—in moderation; do not exercise too much—that too is an indulgence. (I am still on Chapter 2 of the book on the once famous Canadian Air Force exercises!); befriend doctors; they are essentially good people, but do not take them as seriously as they take themselves! Stay active and engaged. Do these and you will remain young in body and mind. And as the days pass, if you are content with what you have done and what you are, and are surrounded by loving family and friends, those are all the riches you need.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes it is written: 'To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven.' This, surely, is a time to remember and write. And further in that same Book it says, 'There is nothing better than a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion . . .'

So let me rejoice in my works, as I do, for this is my portion.

Read on.

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1

THE ROOTS OF BELONGING

My arrival was, I think, well timed. A family chronicle maintained by my maternal grandfather noted that his eldest daughter, Annama, gave birth to a son, 'Verghese, alias Boobli', at 9.30 p.m. on 21 June 1927, in the cantonment of Maymyo, Burma. Being the summer solstice and therefore the longest day in the year, it suggests a balmy evening in that lovely little hill station in the Shan States where my father, Captain George Verghese of the Indian Medical Service, was a military doctor (Burma being administratively part of India until 1937).

Into what kind of world was I born? I shall refer to *The Times of India*, Bombay, as that is the paper with which I later started my career. The front page of the *The Times* of 21 June 1927 (priced at one anna) only carried advertisements on its cover page as was the general practice. More of that later. Turn inside, and mill shares were reported sagging (though tramway shares were briskly traded). Vallabhai Patel was offering satyagraha in Nagpur. Aviation history was being made. While the rival *Statesman* had pictures of Captain Lindbergh being greeted by admirers in Croydon after his historic trans-Atlantic flight from the United States, *The Times* tracked two flights, one from the UK to India and the other from Holland to the East Indies. Over in Calcutta, it reported excitement, with people expectantly waiting for an experiment in 'long distance broadcasting' from the United States. Finally, an editorial lamented the failure of efforts in Bombay Province and elsewhere to revive 'village panchayats for self-government in India'.

Those anxious to forget their cares had quite a choice. The Excelsior Theatre was showing Frank Lehrer's famous operetta, *The Count of*

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Luxembourg; the Empress, *Les Miserables*; and the Edward Theatre, *The Phantom of the Circus*. The Taj Mahal Hotel invited guests (Evening Dress Only) to an after dinner dance with the 'St. Louis 5' of the SS *Rajputana* in attendance.

The front page of *The Times* advertised British, American and Japanese sailing schedules to and from India. Thomas Cook and Cox and Kings offered their packing and banking services. Three Japanese banks jostled the Imperial Bank and the Bank of Baroda. The Charleville Hotel, Mussoorie, proclaimed that it was the only hotel in India patronised by Her Imperial Majesty, Queen Mary. The challenger, Royal Hotel, Lucknow, promised electric lights, fans, running hot and cold water and English sanitary arrangements. That was comforting. Western India called monsoon holiday-makers to the Nasik Hotel, formerly a dak bungalow. F. Cornagalia's of 39 Meadow Street, Bombay, offered 'real Frankfurt sausages and Camembert cheese', but the more sickly were advised to take Royal Yakutia, a wonderful Ayurvedic tonic restorative guaranteed to 'make a man a man'. Leach and Weborny, High Class Tailors and Outfitters of Esplanade Road, Bombay, had special bargains for superior quality Chinese silk suiting (from seventy-five rupees up) and cool twill shirts from thirty rupees. The General Accident Fire and Life Assurance Corporation offered motor and horse insurance.

Finally, readers were invited to buy a *Times of India* 'Map of Bombay and 20 miles around' which would be 'invaluable to the Yachtsman, the Motorist, the Pedestrian and all Sportsmen' and 'most useful in Military Operations'! Obviously, there was nothing like being prepared.

So 21 June 1927 was essentially a normal day with its share of healthy excitement, but for the most part with ordinary people living their ordinary lives. What was special, though, was that a total solar eclipse was forecast that day. Fortunately, no military operations had been cunningly planned in the shadow of the eclipse. At least in Maymyo, an outpost of the Empire, no alarms were sounded and my mother and I spent a peaceful night.

*

Now to unravel the mystery of 'Verghese, alias Boobli', as noted in my grandfather's diary. Aliases generally conjure up images of dubious characters assuming different identities to evade the law and covering up their tracks, possibly, with multiple false passports. Such base suspicions can instantly be laid to rest in this case. My forebears were respectable and loyal subjects of the Maharaja of Travancore.

It is now established that St. Thomas the Apostle brought Christianity

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to the west coast of India around AD 52, making the Kerala Church one of the very oldest in the world, preceding the Church of Rome by almost 300 years. Thomas, a carpenter by profession, visited Taxila in Punjab, 40 kilometres from modern Islamabad. The trail goes cold thereafter until reference is made to his arrival, a couple of years later, in Kwadangallur (Cranganore). Tradition has it that the Apostle built 7 churches in Kerala, and the faith spread gradually.

Legend has it that following the death of a respected elder of a Christian family near Edoor, the body was being taken by boat for burial at Niranam. En route, they chanced upon the local raja, who happened to be bathing in the river at Kalloopara. There being no nearby burial ground for the last rites, the raja generously offered some land. The leader of the mourning party was asked to throw a small *kuri* or *kozhi*, a piece of wood or a twig broken off a tree, in four directions and, in accordance with custom, was awarded the *mannil* or land encompassed therein. A Niranam priest consecrated the land and the body was duly buried, the new settlement marking the founding of the house of Kozhimannil.

And so it was that Geevarghese Matthan (born 1775) established the Kozhimannil *tharavad* (ancestral home) in nearby Karakkal beside a canal, and it was there that his son, Matthan Geevarghese, was born in 1805. The St. Thomas Christians, being somewhat isolated and under the patronage of the Patriarch of Antioch, adopted the orthodox Syrian liturgy. They were hence known as Syrian Christians.

A less romantic theory has it that the family kept chicken (also, *kozhi*) and took its name from the fowl coop it maintained. One way or the other, the name Kozhimannil took root.

Matthan Geevarghese, son of Geevarghese Matthan the founder of the Kozhimannil line, was a schoolteacher and trader with some knowledge of Tamil and Sanskrit. He came in contact with the newly-arrived Anglican missionaries in Travancore, who established a seminary. Finding that the Bibles were written in Syriac, which few understood, he translated the Gospels into Malayalam. These new influences engendered debate and triggered a reform movement within the Orthodox Jacobite Church, resulting in the formation of a breakaway reformed Marthoma (St. Thomas) Church whose Methran had his seat at Tiruvalla, near Karakkal.

Matthan Geevarghese joined the reformed church and sent the second of his three sons, Geevarghese Geevarghese, more familiarly known as Varkichan, to learn English at the British missionary seminary near Tiruvalla. The missionaries subsequently sent the boy to an English high

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school in Madras, where his name was anglicised to George Verghese. Geevarghese was probably derived from the popular Greek name, Georghios, which was brought to Kerala by Greek/Levantine traders like the many other Greek names, such as Alexander and Philip, popular among Malabar Christians.

*

Varkichan, now George Verghese, went on to pass the vakil's examination, but became a district board teacher in British Malabar. Varkichan's first son, Verghese Verghese, my paternal grandfather, decided to adopt Verghese as the family surname and so named his firstborn, my father, George Verghese. As my father's eldest son I should, according to custom, have taken my grandfather's name, and that meant I would have been called Verghese Verghese. That is what my maternal grandfather had assumed and, on hearing of my birth, entered the name 'Verghese, alias Boobli' in his diary. Instead, I was christened George Verghese.

So much for the name Verghese (or its variants Geevarghese, Varghese, Varughis, Verghis and Varkey). What about the 'alias Boobli'? Since Geevarghese Geevarghese or even Verghese Verghese were somewhat forbidding and formal, it was necessary to give the child a more 'homely' everyday name. It is difficult to say when pet names came into vogue but Kunju, Kutty and Kochan, Malayalam variants of the term 'baby' or 'child', continued to be used beyond the cradle. As these proliferated, recourse was had to Kochakutty (small boy) or a truly nano-name, Kunjuoonjakutty (small baby-baby), which scarcely made for greater enlightenment. The first pet names took the form of Georgekutty, Thomaskutty, Mathaikunju or Mariakutty, to which an 'achayan', 'chen' or 'cochamma' might be appended as a term of respect for older persons like 'kaka', 'da' and 'didi' in other parts of the country. Thus my father's youngest brother was the Kunjuoonjakuttychayan, an oxymoron, literally baby-baby-elder brother, while one of my mother's sisters, Elizabeth, was Aleykuttycochamma (Little Liz big sister).

Things were obviously getting out of hand and so my paternal grandfather named his youngest son Boobli. Nobody is certain from where that name materialised. Alas, Uncle Boobli died young of tetanus shortly before I was born and his pet name passed on to me.

On my formal birth certificate, marriage certificate and passport, my name, however, remains George Verghese. More confusing has been the fact that my passport reads George Verghese, son of George Verghese. Many an immigration officer has pored over that one, and I have seen strong men wilt in their effort to solve the mystery!

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I am ahead of my story. Though of pure Travancore stock, I have personally never lived in Kerala. My father was a member of the Indian Medical Service and all his postings were exclusively in British India, except for the years he served in France during the First World War. But I visited Kerala, off and on, during the holidays to spend time with the huge extended family presided over by my grandparents, Dewan Bahadur Dr Verghese Verghese and Rahelamma in their welcoming home, Pearl Moor, in Tiruvalla. Both were greatly loved and revered by all.

Grandfather was born on 18 February 1865, and nicknamed Baby. But on qualifying as an apothecary in 1884, he came to be popularly known as Apothecary Baby. The Madras States Directory, 1929, noted that:

> Dr V. Verghese was a specialist in ophthalmic work, having for some time been Assistant to Dr Drake Brockman the most outstanding ophthalmic surgeon in India in his time. He was chairman of the Municipal Council, Mangalore, from 1916 to 1919, during which time he did splendid service in matters of sanitation and general health, besides successfully combating the food crisis, his labours having earned him the well-merited appreciation of His Excellency, the Governor of Madras. He was made Rao Saheb in 1914 and Dewan Bahadur in 1922.

On his retirement from the Madras Medical Service in 1921, Grandfather's services were immediately snapped up by the enlightened Maharaja of Cochin who appointed him chief medical and sanitary officer and his own personal physician.

As chief medical officer, Dr Verghese was an ex-officio member of the Cochin Legislative Council. According to the official records of the 1925 budget-session proceedings, he defended the department against charges of 'luxury expenditure'. Responding to criticism for installing an X-ray machine, 'when there are good communications and patients can go to Madras for treatment', he said that this was not 'some trumpery thing' but 'a valuable aid to diagnosis of appendicitis and the treatment of certain diseases'. It was not proper, he remarked, to oppose improvements on the ground that 'we got on without it all this time'. To which a wit retorted, 'We got on without the Legislative Council.'

Before he left Ernakulam in 1929, Dr Verghese was honoured by the Maharaja of Cochin with a *veera changalam* or gold chain, in recognition of his outstanding services. He had already purchased property on the outskirts of Tiruvalla, a sleepy taluka town in Central Travancore where, after retirement, he built the sprawling Pearl Moor mansion.

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And so to Tiruvalla, but not into retirement. Apothecary Baby was too active and sought after to be allowed to remain idle, nor did he want that. Providing Dr P.S. Warrier, founder of the famous Arya Vaidyashala of Kottakal, with a grounding in allopathic medicine, the better to practise Ayurveda, was one among Grandfather's many accomplishments. He also built a charitable hospital near Pearl Moor and set to tend the sick and the needy, while Rahelamma busied herself in endowing and establishing the Tiruvalla YWCA and plunging into social work. An orphanage, Shalem, followed. And then the little Kuttapuzha church, vicarage and parish hall opposite Pearl Moor, where the family and the local community would worship, and in whose graveyard my grandparents, my father and so many others of the family lie buried. He continued to work at the hospital as long as he could, and then gifted it to an English medical mission to run.

What shall I say of Pearl Moor, that rambling mansion, with its joy and laughter, the family home where all the many aunts, uncles and their broods of children would gather during the holidays and other festive occasions, or to celebrate a wedding in the family. It was a sprawling house, set in the middle of a large and once secluded estate, with a cypress driveway, tiled roof and colourful floors laid with the most beautiful Dutch tiles gifted to Grandfather by grateful patients with burgher connections.

Though my father and his brothers and sisters built their own homes nearby on retirement, Pearl Moor was the fountainhead and lodestar to which everybody gravitated to enjoy the welcoming warmth and grace of that wonderful couple. There Grandfather, with balding pate, moustache and little hump would sit bare-chested in his office with his *tappal* (mail) box and the 'writer', who managed the rubber estates and paddy fields. He would smoke a Trichy cheroot or enjoy his *vetla* or paan, with a huge brass spittoon by his side. Or later, sprawled in an armchair with a swivel leg-rest, he would receive all manner of visitors in the front verandah.

The dining room, kitchen and large store rooms (almost little granaries) were Grandmother's preserve. She dressed in the traditional white two-piece *chatta-thuni* and wore large, circular, hanging gold earrings that framed her handsome face and flaxen hair. She spoke only Malayalam and was unmistakably the mistress of the house.

At half-past-seven, before supper, everybody including the household staff would gather in Grandmother's study for evening prayers beginning with a lesson read out sonorously by Grandfather from the large, well-thumbed, gilt-edged Malayalam family Bible.

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Meals were family occasions, the men eating first and amply of all the usual *nadan* staples and delicacies—*appams*, fried bananas, *pootu* (long rolls of steamed rice flour with scraped coconut) and coconut treacle, or steamed tapioca for breakfast, rice with blood-red curried fish and many other fish and meat dishes, with buttermilk, topped in different seasons with varieties of choice mangoes, sapota and other fruit planted and nurtured in the compound. On Sundays, there could be pilau and chicken curry and, on occasion, pork vindaloo. What delights! Atta was scarcely ever used, though modern homes would buy bread loaves from Best Bakery, which bakes the best bread in the whole wide world.

When several cousins were visiting, soft palm mats would be unrolled and a gaggle of children would sleep on the floor. We would rise at six in the morning and rub our teeth with charcoal powder, which made them shiny white, but must have worn off the enamel. That was possibly the reason why so many lost their teeth while relatively young and took to wearing dentures.

My first recollections of Pearl Moor probably date back to 1932, when many of the extended family came to Tiruvalla for Christmas. Five of the boys received toy air guns from Uncle Tom, my father's youngest brother, who came down from Waltair (Visakhapatnam) with a box laden with gifts. What a time we had! It was the year that my eldest cousin, Gracie Cochama, got married. A feast was being cooked at home in huge brass cooking vessels. But the wedding service came first. I recall the hymn 'Bread of Heaven' being lustily sung, rising to a crescendo with the chorus, 'Bread of Heaven/Bread of Heaven/Feed me/Feed me/Feed me till I want no more.' With so much delicious food cooking at home, I found this hollering beside the point when there was a far more practical way of getting on with the job!

Later, as a schoolboy, I would be sent to Pearl Moor periodically by my parents to do the rounds. Grandfather would meet me at Ernakulam or Alwaye and we would go by car to Tiruvalla, skirting the backwaters, crossing three ferries, driving through the rolling red-laterite mid-hills, with flooded paddies being ploughed in the valleys. Later in the season, they would become waving carpets of emerald green, fringed with coconut palms and dotted with little habited 'islands' in that snaking sea of water.

There was water everywhere, and so much life on the river with craft of all sizes and descriptions being paddled or poled across the lagoons, streams and connecting canals, laden with coconuts, coir husk, sand, and produce of various kinds—travelling markets lazily floating down dappled waterways, with different vendors emitting their own special

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cries to advertise their approach and their wares. The *valloms* (boats) on the backwater were a spectacle and I shall never forget the excitement of being taken to the famous festival at Aranmula on the Pamba for the annual snake-boat race with a hundred glistening oarsmen to each boat, paddling to lilting chants and the rhythmic beat that went *thi, thi, tha, tha, thai, thai*. The mountains to the east were no less lovely with thick forests and spice gardens yielding to the well-manicured Munnar tea gardens.

No wonder Kerala has been named God's Own Country. It certainly was then; less so now. The very high density of population made most of the state a suburban sprawl with no intermission between town and country. It was only in the 1960s that Ernakulam and Quilon were linked by rail. Until then one travelled either by boat or along narrow roads that sliced through the paddies and even narrower by-lanes winding their way through an undulating landscape. Every habitation, howsoever humble, had a garden planted with banana, some tapioca, perhaps a jackfruit or coconut tree with a vine. And some chicken or, maybe, duck breeding in adjacent waters.

Troops of chattering children, neatly uniformed, walking to school and back, was a common and heartening sight. Several newspapers catered to a literate, politically conscious, garrulous and highly unionised society—its people the beneficiaries of enlightened social reformers and maharajas.

The region around Tiruvalla has been among the prime areas sending abroad migrant workers, including nurses and teachers. Inward remittances of Gulf money have, over the years, transformed the scene, with ever more ostentatious homes and garish villas dotting the countryside, to the accompaniment of soaring labour costs. Tiruvalla now has its own high-rises, malls and air-conditioned mortuaries where the bodies of the 'Gulf-deceased' flown back through any of Kerala's many international airports can lie in state, awaiting the arrival of faraway relatives from the United States, Europe and elsewhere.

*

What of my maternal lineage? My mother, Anna or Annama was born in 1896, the eldest daughter of Pannampunna John Varughese, a judge of the Travancore High Court.

Interestingly, he commenced writing a diary in 1903, and filled it with nuggets of information about the times. The very first entry on New Year's Day mentions a procession by schoolboys in the afternoon at the *thirunakara* (the town square), followed later that evening by another

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procession and fireworks to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII. This was followed by a garden party the next day at the Union Club with an athletics display and music concert.

Grandfather or Velliappachan's daily routine was uncomplicated: attendance at court, followed by tennis at the Union Club when the case list was light. There is reference to corruption in court with disturbing reports of clients paying money, though for what purpose and to whom is not mentioned. There were church services on Sundays and Christmas was celebrated on 7 January, in accordance with the Orthodox Marthoma calendar.

That August was a good month as Velliappachan received a salary increase of Rs 50, and since his earlier salary was Rs 178, this represented a considerable jump. The figures might sound paltry but considering that an ICS officer received a starting monthly salary of Rs 400 until Independence, it was good money. The last few pages of the 1903 diary are devoted to monthly accounts. 'Mrs Varughese' received between Rs 30 and Rs 40 a month, presumably for household expenses and provisions (other than things like paddy and coconut that probably came from the estate). The house rent came to Rs 3. There were many other sundry payments too and Rs 90 was deposited in the savings bank account. One entry notes the prize purchase of a bicycle, neighbours' envy, owner's pride, for Rs 200, and a 'cycle tutor' at Rs 5 per month!

I recall Velliappachan in retirement at the family home, Varicheril, on the Meenathil River on the outskirts of Kottayam. I used to go to Kottayam from Tiruvalla during my Kerala visits but I did not get to know him as well as I did my paternal grandfather, as Velliappachan died when I was quite young.

Those days, most families were so large that it was difficult to know and keep track of all the relatives, especially as I was no more than an itinerant visitor to Kerala. Jonichayan, my mother's eldest brother, thought that this simply would not do and decided to take the matter in hand. So on one of my visits to Kottayam as a schoolboy, he entrusted me to his eldest son, George, with elaborate instructions to take me from house to house in Central Travancore and introduce me to the family, over a three-day travelling seminar. I do not know whether it was Georgekuttychayan or I who was the wearier at the end of the exercise. It was impossible to memorise so many new faces and names. But I thereafter claimed a relationship with every Syrian Christian family until proven otherwise!

*

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Following his father's death in 1947, my father decided to call it a day and gave up his post-retirement position as Director of Health Service, Tata Iron and Steel, Jamshedpur, and returned home to Tiruvalla. He had some years earlier built a large house, Muthoor Vilas, in a corner of the Pearl Moor estate, and he now settled there. But Pearl Moor remained the family hub in Grandmother's lifetime and continued to be a major port of call . . . and for me, home. My father died in 1956 and, some years later, my brother Roshan and I persuaded our mother to live with us, by turns, rather than be alone in Tiruvalla. Muthoor Vilas was finally sold by Roshan in the 1980s and the house and compound now house the Marthoma School, which has become a flourishing educational establishment.

If I have dwelt so much on Kerala, it is because it has, for me, been home and heritage in a deeper sense. I remember the patriarch, Dr V. Verghese, sonorously reciting Goldsmith's lines from *The Traveller*:

> Where'er I roam, whatever realms to see,
> My heart untravelled fondly turns to thee.

My heart too, untravelled, so often returns to Kerala, lesser and lesser visited with passing years and with the loss or scattering around India and the world of fond, familiar faces. But memories linger and, like a fugitive fragrance, hauntingly recall fragments of times past.

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2

THE GOLDEN YEARS: GROWING UP

My father, George Verghese, was born in Badagara (Malabar) in June 1888. He studied locally, went to Hyderabad to read medicine and then left for Edinburgh and St. Andrews in Scotland for higher studies, in 1912. He came back to marry my mother, Annama, in Kottayam in January 1913, and returned to Scotland, leaving his bride of sixteen behind with his parents, in Mangalore. The First World War was in its second year when he completed his MRCP. He was inducted into the Indian Medical Service, and served in advanced field hospitals on several fronts in France with the Allied Expeditionary Forces.

My sister, Meenu, recalls my mother telling her how hard life was for a daughter-in-law in those days. She would get up at half-past-four in the morning to light a woodfire to make coffee for my grandfather, an early riser. She also had to take care of my father's deceased sister's three boys and pack them off to school. The War over, my father returned from England in 1918, laden with albums of wartime photographs, stories that were often retold; and shining brass cases of expended artillery shells as souvenirs and household adornments. (One of these still serves as an umbrella stand in our apartment in Delhi.)

Father was posted to Bombay and it was there that mother set up house in a totally different, cosmopolitan environment. She was helped along by the wives of some of father's Parsi friends who kindly saw her through the rites of passage of housekeeping and varied culinary arts, and the etiquette and formalities of playing hostess. It was under their guidance that she made the transition from the traditional Malayalee attire, *kachamuri, chatta and kavani,* to the sari, which she always thereafter

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wore with her pallav draped back to front, in the Parsi manner.

Perhaps it was at that stage or, maybe, a little later that *Mrs Beeton's Cookery Book* entered our lives. It ran over 1000 pages and had a huge number of coloured illustrations of roasts, grills, bakes, pies, soups, sauces, salads, desserts, savouries and a lot else, with elaborate notes on how the table was to be laid, many cunning ways of folding serviettes, protocols relating to wines and wine glasses, notes on which spoon to use for what, and much more that the truly propah hostess should know. Mrs Beeton should have made a fortune on her Indian royalties, for no 'modern' Indian household seemed complete without that remarkable tome.

Mrs Beeton was a long-time companion in our home. I would drool over the illustrations. But grandmother had taught mother much more. She became a wonderful cook and, ultimately, a very Malayalee wife, mother and hostess with a marvellous sense of humour. Her one great failure and regret was not being able to get her sons to learn more than the most basic Malayalam. Living away from Kerala at a time when few Kerala families lived in the north, and then being sent to boarding school, stacked the odds against Malayalam. It was much later that I realised that this was truly my loss.

Lulu (Rachel), the first of four children, arrived in 1920. Soon thereafter, my father returned to Scotland to specialise in tropical medicine, with mother and Lulu accompanying him. Baths were a luxury, especially in the cold Scottish winter. Mother had to get accustomed to using a communal bathroom, but Lulu got her daily hot bath in the kitchen sink!

On returning to India, Captain Verghese was posted to Deesa (near Ajmer), an Indian Army station in what was then called Rajputana. And then to Ahmednagar, where Meenu (Rebecca) was born in 1924. My parents were there for a couple of years before Father was transferred to Maymyo in Burma where I was born. I was barely two when we moved again, this time to Peshawar. It was a period of tribal turbulence in the Frontier but Mother refused to be evacuated and would sleep within the fort at night with the children, for reasons of security.*

From Peshawar father was posted, around 1929, to the Command Hospital in Bangalore, where my younger brother Roshan (later Major General John Verghese) was born in 1932. The family subsequently moved to a nice house on Primrose Road near South Parade, and my two sisters were sent to school. Bangalore was then a quiet city of stately

*From Rebecca Kuruvilla's *A Brief Memoir*, written around 2000 (unpublished).

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parks and leafy avenues mostly inhabited, it seemed, by retired gentry with lovely gardens behind gates that warned the unwary and the wicked to 'Beware of Dogs'! But we kept no dogs.

Mother drove a soft-top red Baby Austen but we children would, on evenings and holidays, walk to a nearby general store, Venson's, where Mother often shopped, and the kindly salesmen would slip us zebra-coloured bull's-eyes that would be eaten, not greedily, but sucked slowly through as many delicious minutes as possible.

The Good Book says: 'To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven'. Mother was a strict disciplinarian and, according to her way of thinking, there clearly was a time for study and a time for play. It was during such a time for study, one morning, that she drove off for a meeting, leaving us with a stern injunction to study.

No sooner had she departed than Lulu said, 'Let's go to Venson's.'

Meenu and I readily nodded assent and off we trooped on this daring enterprise, tingling with anticipation. Our manager friend at Venson's greeted us warmly and thrust some bull's-eyes into our not unwilling palms. The taste buds had scarcely been tickled when, horror of horrors, we saw a red Baby Austen drive up and park outside. Panic might have been our undoing. But, with great presence of mind, Lulu communicated the extreme urgency and delicacy of the situation to the manager. Appreciating the emergency, he gamely pushed us into his private office in time to greet Mother, who was just entering the store.

Lulu fell on her knees with a tremulous, 'Let us pray.' And all three of us sinners were soon fervently intoning the Lord's Prayer, particularly the bit about '(forgiving) us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us'. There could not have been a more devotional moment in our lives.

The good Lord heard our prayers. The danger passed. The red Baby Austen moved on, and three pairs of legs took off as fast as they could run, to get back to base. Her little angels were immersed in study when Mother returned home! Impressed as I was by the power of prayer that day, I have never been overly religious or believed excessively in organised religion but, presumably like most others, have always turned to prayer in times of trouble. What I did imbibe from my parents and family, and later at school, were moral values, ethical standards and a regard for faith or spirituality rather than mere indulgence in the rituals of organised religion.

*

On Father's return from Britain in 1934, he was posted to Hazaribagh—a lovely little district headquarters in Bihar, nestling amidst lakes, hills

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and forests on the Chota Nagpur plateau. He was superintendent of the large, high-security Central Jail, home to many leading political prisoners of the day.

Some recollections of Hazaribagh stand out. The electric storms and lashing monsoon rain frightened me no end, especially as frogs would get into the bathroom through the drain-holes. Meenu would be my shield and protector! More frightening was the great Bihar earthquake of 1934 when the ground rocked and trembled for what seemed like days on end. We practically lived outdoors on the lawn, wary of further tremors.

Itinerant Chinese peddlers selling silks, linen, lace and other ware provided periodic distraction. John Chinaman, as these men were called, would work the territory from Calcutta, wandering from place to place, making local house to house forays by cycle or on foot, with their huge cloth bundles slung over a shoulder. Their arrival was always keenly awaited for the exotica they brought. Once the goods were selected, bargaining would commence. This was a science and a sport. John Chinaman would protest that he was being driven to starvation and ruin but, ultimately, a deal would be struck and both parties would part with a glint in the eye, in the belief that each had won the day.

Father was a loyal civil servant whose sympathies, like that of most other Indian officials, lay with the Congress. Meenu records, in a private memoir for her children, that political prisoners were accorded many privileges and Father treated them with respect and consideration. He valued the time he could spend with the country's leaders, and thought it important that his children should also have the opportunity of meeting them. Thus Meenu and I would often troop down to the jail and be allowed to spend time with Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Dr Khan Sahib. They obviously missed their own families, and would seat us on their laps, feed us with nuts, amply supplied from Peshawar, and regale us with stories. They were gentle and kindly men. Another famous political prisoner we met was Rajendra Prasad.

Prisoners in shackles would tend our garden and the domestic staff would tell us lurid tales of their crimes. We once went to visit the jail workshop to see the beautiful carpets prisoners wove for government offices and for sale. One convict even tuned our piano. Another pulled the cloth punkahs hung from high ceilings, sometimes with the guy rope tied to his big toe, which would keep twitching to stir the air even if the wretched man fell asleep. But there were other, more sombre occasions. Meenu records Father occasionally having to rise and dress in the small hours of the morning to be present at hangings, 'a depressing

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and unpleasant duty'. And if and when a prisoner escaped, the jail bell would toll and she would shiver with fright and excitement, as presumably I did too.

Later, with Meenu also deported to school, I was left on my own. Looking back, I now realise that this was when I started on my Experiments with Truth. Summers in Hazaribagh can be trying. One day, when Mother had retired for a siesta in preparation for an evening party, I entered her room and espied a pair of dentures in a small glass container. Those were Mother's 'teeth', strangely disembodied in the jar. Maybe in a fit of languid stupor engendered by the heat, I was suddenly seized by the Scientific Temper. Taking the dentures out of the jar, I stole out of the bedroom, found a quiet nook and, with the aid of a brick, pounded the dentures to dust. There was, I later realised, probably more Temper than Science in that imprudent experiment. I restored the debris to the jar and went off in search of new adventure.

The commotion began a half hour later when Mother awoke to find the dentures gone. The domestics were summoned and a Great Search ensued. I was duly questioned and admitted full responsibility, not without a sense of innocent accomplishment. Not everybody saw it that way and Mother was distraught. The poor darling did not know whether to laugh or to cry. Father asked me what had prompted me to do such a thing. I had nothing to say. How could I explain that surge of scientific temper? Years later, I read of Mallory's reply to the query why he wanted to climb Everest. His classic answer was, 'Because it is there!' I realise now that that was my unspoken response. Some time later, in another notable experiment, I shaved off my eyebrows to the great consternation of my parents. The stern disapproval with which that was met short-circuited what could have been an interesting and possibly brilliant scientific career

It was waiting to happen. The day of reckoning was not long delayed. There being no 'good' school in Hazaribagh, I was sent off to be a boarder at Bishop Westcott Boys' School at Namkum, near Ranchi, aged all of seven years and eight months. I do not know who was more fretful, Mother or I. My first letter home, indeed, my first letter ever, dated 4 March 1935, was a masterful composition. I reported that I was happy and 'learning very hard', had many friends, was playing many games, had gone to Ranchi 'to see the sports', had built a fort (how? where?), 'gained ten annas' (with no explanation for this huge accretion of sudden wealth), and asked for 'some more sweets'. It was a succinct and lucid epistle and no parent could have asked for more.

The next thing that happened was that I was admitted to the civil

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hospital in Ranchi with 'double pneumonia' or wet pleurisy (you can take your pick) and had to be operated to drain the left lung of fluid. My parents spent many anxious days and nights in hospital with me, and finally brought me back to Hazaribagh for rest, recuperation and home nursing. And that was the beginning of plans to send me to the Doon School.

*

The Doon School, arguably the best in the country, though this will be disputed by envious rivals, sprang from the vision of its founder, S.R. Das, who had studied in England and had then been called to the Bar. He envisioned a similar kind of public school at home that would turn out the sort of well-rounded young men who would be called upon to serve the new India he foresaw.

On being appointed Law Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council in 1925, he pursued the idea with the backing of Lord Reading. His death came as a severe blow to the project but, in 1931, Sir Joseph Bhore took over and momentum was revived. The Forest Research Institute at Dehra Dun was soon to vacate its Chandbagh estate for more spacious premises in New Forest. And so it came to pass. This was truly a gift from heaven for there could not be a lovelier estate than the veritable botanical garden that had been created in Chandbagh, with a wonderful variety of trees and shrubs watered from a stone aqueduct drawn from the eastern Jamuna canal, and a stately ivy-clad Main Building against the backdrop of the Mussoorie Hills that sparkled with fairy lights at night. The acquisition of the adjacent (Sir James) Skinner's Estate with its litchee groves was to add yet more space and history to Chandbagh.

The first headmaster, Arthur Edward Foot, was recruited by the former viceroy, Lord Irwin, and the school opened its portals in September 1935 with a select band of Indian and English masters who set the tone and standards.The formal opening was held a month later in the presence of the viceroy, Lord Linlithgow.

Foot wished for more than a mere English transplant on Indian soil. He wanted a school that was Indian in culture, spirit and aspiration. Unlike Macaulay, he did not want to turn out Brown Sahibs but proud, elite Indians who would lead by example and not fall prey to elitism, which he despised. He made a tour of notable educational institutions in India and talked with eminent educationists—including Gurudev Tagore at Shantiniketan—to learn from them. Culture mattered and he was determined that the best of pan-Indian culture should take root in Chandbagh.

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The goals of education were set out by Foot:

> By fourteen a boy should have learnt the ordinary principles of social behaviour. He should be able to speak equally to servants, to Mahatma Gandhi or to the viceroy, and to do this without any self-consciousness ... Now is the time to develop that elusive faculty known as taste—the power of distinguishing between beauty and ugliness, between good and evil.
>
> By sixteen, you will have found that it is not physical strength or even mental ingenuity that is of primary importance, but rather your personal example and character ... Your nature and attitude to life will have influence—much deeper than you ever suspect—on those with whom you live; and it is taste which governs your attitude to life.

And then:

> Eighteen—the close of the last chapter ... Now it is too late to worry about the things you might have done better at school ... But which is the road you mean to travel? What is your ambition, your ideal?
>
> Are you going to use your equipment and your opportunities in order to secure as much as possible of wealth and power and influence with the great? Is it your ambition to be a successful member of an acquisitive society? Do you hope your education will enable you to get more from your country or give more to it? Will the monument you leave behind you (for you cannot take it with you) be a palace on Malabar Hill or will it be one built in the hearts of the people you have served? Have you been able to learn the secret of non-attachment to material things—that what you are and what you do and what you feel are more important than the material things that you have ... May your ideals inspire you to lead a life of service.

That was the credo. Taste, service, non-attachment to material things. I left school at seventeen and have recounted these passages at some length because they well describe even today the purpose of education—building character to use knowledge for the service of society and especially the disadvantaged.

*

My earliest recollection of Arthur Foot is of being met by an austere and awesome figure at the Dehra Dun railway station, on what seemed a

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bitterly cold early February morning in 1936. The school had opened with 88 boys the previous September and now 124 more scholars had been added, many of them, like me, just a little over 8 years old. Since Father could not leave town, he had deputed one of the Hazaribagh Central Jail staff, Mr Patro, to escort me—a captive little boy in a new brown suit—to Dehra Dun.

'And who is this?' Foot asked me.

'The Jailor, Sir', I somewhat falteringly replied.

Foot was greatly amused.

I obviously settled in fairly well. A letter home dated 8 March informed Mother that I could now play two pieces on the violin, that we had lost a house match and that I was preparing for a geography test.

Many records have been established and broken at the Doon School. Mine was among the earliest and truly historic. On 24 September 1936, my sister Lulu's birthday, I tripped and fell while playing football. This was the first fracture of a limb in school and so the matter evoked great concern. Foot sent off a telegram to Father to take me home and then sat beside me through the small hours, counting sheep and telling stories! A couple of days later, Uncle Tom arrived from Calcutta and took me by train to Cuttack, where Father was now posted as Director of Health and Inspector-General of Prisons in the newly formed state of Orissa. In the years thereafter, Doon School boys have broken every limb in their body. But none has had the HM sit beside him, nor been sent home. Noshir Cooper suffered multiple fractures the next term and snidely insinuated a greater title to fame. This is of course sheer sophistry and objective historians will no doubt disregard so brazen an effort to rewrite history.

There is another incident I vividly recall which, for lack of any better name, I shall label 'The Awful Appearance of Mr Foot'. In those days—1940, perhaps—jam or marmalade was in short supply in relation to the prodigious appetite for such delicacies. Breakfast was after the first class and there used to be a 'race for jam' from the Main Building to the Jaipur House dining room. The boy who got to his allotted table first would grab the jam jar and help himself, no doubt with what he considered astonishing moderation, while the others, in order of arrival, would scream 'Bag's second', 'Bag's third', and so on. Anything after 'Bag's four' was usually an empty slogan in a very literal sense. Thus it was that within thirty seconds of the commencement of breakfast there would be approximately four smiles and six scowls at each table.

Mr Foot used to breakfast in different Houses off and on. And so he arrived at Jaipur House one morning and sat at the head of our table

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just as the 'jam session' had ended. The meal proceeded in dignified innocence and with a commendable display of good manners until Mr Foot in clear and unmistakable terms said, 'May I have some marmalade, please.'

Easier said than done! Never was there such a transformation. Four grins faded. Six expectant, yet troubled, smiles appeared. What followed was an epic of heroism. As word was hissed down the table to 'Please pass the marmalade to the HM', the boys seated next to Foot engaged him in animated conversation while the others whipped the jam jar on to their knees and relayed it back under the table, each putting back as much marmalade as he could, each according to his ability. The HM got a decent spoonful of marmalade and the situation was saved. Great presence of mind, qualities of leadership and camaraderie were witnessed that morning, and it is no surprise that at least four of the dramatis personae rose to influential positions in government and business in later life.

Foot never taught me, but he did take elocution classes making us distinguish between 'v' and 'w'. 'Don't swallow your words!' he would roar, and we would promptly swallow the entire sentence. But what stands out most was morning Assembly, preceded by fine renderings of Indian and Western recorded music. This would be followed by the hymns of Tagore, Iqbal, Kabir and Guru Nanak, led by the school orchestra and choir, and then prayers that one learnt to love for their poetry and inspiration. These, as so much else in school, and mixing with boys of all faiths, castes and regions, taught us to be completely secular and truly Indian. 'Jana gana mana' was the school song from the very start, long before it was adopted as the national anthem.

*

A school party had gone to Midnapore in 1943 to do relief work under Foot after the grim cyclone that came in the wake of the great Bengal famine. A year later, the school mounted a flood relief expedition to North Bihar. Though I was now in college, I joined the party and we all travelled together from Delhi by third-class rail, bus, boat and elephant to reach marooned villages where we distributed grain, blankets, soap and medicines. I wrote an account of our relief expedition for *The Doon School Weekly*.

> This area (bordering Nepal) has been subject to floods from the River Kosi for the past eight years. Vast tracts are marshlands for part of the year, but the area is generally prosperous. The

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1944 floods were however more devastating and prolonged (July-October) and brought the overflow of the Kosi further westwards, making the total width about 15 miles. . . .

The people are very poor and have been hit hard by this last flood. Malaria, kala azar, and a very bad type of scabies are rife and before we left some cases of smallpox had been reported as well. With no cultivation possible the villagers are left without any sort of income and, having no handicrafts, sit idle. They seem to be a fatalistic people, accepting floods as an act of God and staying at home with folded hands expecting things to happen. They have not even troubled to rebuild their huts.

*

If Foot was a profound influence in our lives, it was because he was a great headmaster and a good friend. So were the other masters. John Martyn, made our History lessons truly come alive. Anyone caught napping in his class on a lazy afternoon would be awoken by a well-aimed piece of chalk. Jack Gibson instilled in us an abiding interest in Geography and the environment, mountains and rivers. He was a bachelor and was always exhorting boys to 'fall over the handlebars of (a) bicycle' before it was too late to feel the joy and wonder of that experience.

There is the famous story of a dishevelled Gibson, come newly from England, going out on a trek. Entering a small village to buy some eggs he interrogated a belle in his failing Hindi, thus: *'Tum merga janta hai? Merga ka memsahib, mergee. Mergee ka babalog, anda.'* Saying which, he flapped his arms in a vigorous imitation of a bird in flight. The bewildered maiden, recovering from deep shock, fled the scene beating her head and shrieking aloud that the ancient prophecy that the demons might some day descend on this sinful world and take over the earth had probably come true! That was an eggless morning for Jack Gibson!

My housemaster Howell Thomas, Lyndon Clough and Sidddhartha Chary taught me English, and Chetan Anand (who later went on to make films) Hindi. S.C. Roy was another lovable master. Caleb, who played hockey for India in the Berlin Olympics with Dhyan Chand, and R.L. Holdsworth (Holdy) were among our great sportsmen.

Holdy in particular was a keen mountaineer, angler, shikari, dog-lover and an outdoor man. He'd smoked a pipe atop Kamet in 1931, picked a peony at 20,000 feet and held a world record for skiing down the high Himalayan snows. Martyn and Gibson were also mountaineers and between them popularised climbing as a major sport among the

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boys, and some like Nandu Jayal, Suman Dubey and Gurdial Singh (a master) went on to achieve great distinction in mountaineering. Gurdial (Guru), in fact, has spent more time at the desolate South Col of Everest at 26,000 feet than any other man alive. Aamir Ali, another Old Boy, who joined the ILO in Geneva has, in recent years, been in the forefront of those patiently working to have the embattled Siachen glacier and adjacent snowfields declared an International Peace Park. And it was Flight Lieutenant Nalni Jayal who, in 1953, took the aerial photograph of the Everest that was reproduced on a special Indian postage stamp commemorating its ascent by Tenzing and Hillary, earlier that year.

Jaipur House was not a mountaineering house like the others. We did some trekking and white water rafting on the Jamuna, though. I regret that I never climbed higher than Kharamba Hill (some 10,000 feet plus), which we called Mt Kharamba as that sounded distinctly grander. My great moment came around 1964 when, with becoming modesty, my trusty Sherpa Austen A-40 and I did Malabar Hill in second gear! I, however, climbed vicariously, persuading *The Times of India* to fund several Indian expeditions to the Everest, Nilkanth, Nun Kun and other great peaks, by buying exclusive rights for serialised articles.*

The portly C.P.S. Menon had his work cut out to teach me Maths. He was a kindly man, but used to be greatly irritated not because boys scribbled equations on his car, but because they often got them wrong. V.N. Kapur took PT and Sam Moinuddin coached us in athletics. There was a famous occasion, possibly apocryphal, when Sam ended a festive gathering with a memorable: 'Three cheers for Mrs Hip, Foot, Foot, hurray!' The variant to this was his starting call before the 100-yards sprint: 'On your marks, Got Set, Went!' that some swear actually stopped the race!

I was taught Physics and amateur Astronomy by Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar and Chemistry by S.C. Agarwal, but having spent my scientific zeal at an early age, as recounted, did not shine in their classes. Agarwal, or Gharsty as he was known, invented the acronym, Dosco, now commonly used to denote a Doon School boy. Dosco was the trade mark he gave to cosmetics produced by boys of his class, for a Chemistry exhibition on Founder's Day. Bhatnagar and Agarwal were affectionately known as the school's very own Laurel and Hardy.

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*These were later edited and compiled by me in *Himalayan Endeavour* (Bombay: *The Times of India*, 1962), perhaps the earliest book on Indian mountaineering, with additional chapters on Himalayan and Karakoram exploration, flora and fauna, the Sherpas, hill butterflies, glaciers and alpine gardening.

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K.N.P. Nair, another Maths teacher, took on the extra-curricular duty of trying to teach me Malayalam. The experiment was a noble failure; there were so many more exciting things happening during spare time like slum cricket, marbles or gulli danda. Chess was popular and one of my more accomplished opponents was Karan Singh, later Sadr-i-Riyasat and governor of J&K, minister, Sanskrit scholar and president of the India International Centre.

Health was important. TAB injections were term routines. Miss Welby, the hospital Sister, would catch boys without hats on even not-so-hot summer days and punish them with a strong dose of castor oil. This seemed to do them a world of good! No boy in school ever got sunstroke. But there were bouts of measles, chicken pox and mumps when the afflicted would be quarantined. This was fun as we had no classes and word got around that nobody was likely to die.

The school routine provided time for arts, crafts, music, carpentry, metal work, motor mechanics and a host of other extra-curricular activities. Shirodkar and Khastgir grounded us in the best traditions of Indian art and music. Arnold Bakke, a Danish scholar who had compiled and researched Indian folk songs, was a frequent visitor and introduced us to the extraordinarily rich heritage of our country's music. Foot happened to visit the famous dance academy in Almora where Uday Shankar was engaged in reviving Indian classical dance traditions. He lost no time in inviting the budding artiste, Zohra Sehgal, her sister Uzra, and Simmi to come to Chandbagh and introduce the boys to Indian dancing. The vivacious Zohra, a much-loved theatre, film and television personality, now over ninety, still remembers that experience with delight as do the boys who flocked around her. A Kathakali maestro, Kelu Nair, followed. All this happened at a time when the revival of Indian dance was in its very infancy. To Foot it was axiomatic that boys be conversant with and proud of their own culture.

The earliest play staged in school was Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, produced by Rashid Ahmed who later became station director, AIR, Delhi, and thereafter director general, broadcasting, in Pakistan. In 1941 the school performed *The Merchant of Venice*. The cast included Dinesh Singh, who went on to become India's foreign minister, the staid Mohammad Ali of Hoti-Mardan (later education minister in West Pakistan) and the irrepressible and lovable Aurangzeb Miangul, the future Akhond (or Wali) of Swat, and other boys from the Frontier Province and Tribal Areas, a far cry from the sad Talibanisation of that region in more recent times. Edward Lear in his *Nonsense Rhymes* asks 'Who or Why or Where or What, Is the Akhond of Swat?' We knew. In 1937, the school staged

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A Pageant of the Doon that retold the history of the Doon Valley from early times and through the period of the Gurkha conquest. I was one of the Gurkha sepoys.

Phyllis King, the Tata House Dame, gave me violin lessons. Sadly, what might have been a promising musical career was rudely cut short some years later in St. Stephen's College by surly murmurs, clearly symptomatic of the growingly rebellious spirit of the times.

My dramatic career, however, progressed famously. I was the Third Beggar in Flecker's *Hassan* and Second Murderer in *Macbeth*. The crowning triumph was playing the First Waiter in *The Inca of Perusalem*. After that, I thought it prudent to retire and work backstage, where I pushed furniture on the sets and stood around and looked worried.

At Doon we lived in dorms under the watchful eye of the housemaster, dame (or house matron), monitors and (senior) prefects, sat in 'toye rooms' for study in the Houses and lived by the bell. The dining room was decorated with House cups and trophies, Rolls of Honour for a variety of achievements and photographs of House teams. I won the Marker Cup for general proficiency and signed the School Honours Book for earning distinctions in trials (examinations), three terms running. This won me a prized *Complete Works of Shakespeare* signed by Foot that I still possess. Poor class work fetched Red Cards; and misbehaviour, Yellow Cards. I had my share of those, and for lesser misdemeanours was punished with 'rounds' by the prefects. This entailed running round the games field a given number of times after breakfast.

In sport, team spirit was emphasised, and playing the game was considered more important than winning. There was no dearth of competition. None the less, boys were encouraged to pass standard physical tests (graded bronze, silver and gold) and to take part in cross-country running (until traffic and urbanisation put an end to that) and mountaineering, where individuals set and improved upon their own standards and, in effect, competed against themselves. Surprisingly, yoga was never taught.

The dignity of labour and social service was inculcated through 'labour quotas' which entailed an hour's effort or more every Wednesday afternoon in cleaning the campus, composting, helping build the Rose Bowl, the school's amphitheatre, and cycling to Tunwala for 'village uplift'.

Saturday nights found boys donning Indian dress and being entertained, most often with films of Charlie Chaplain, Laurel and Hardy and Harold Lloyd. There were musical evenings, skits and debates. I used to stammer and for long shied away from speaking in

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public until I took to debating and gradually overcame the handicap to a great extent, though not entirely. Swimming was another bugbear and it took me years to overcome my fear of water.

The Tuck Shop was open on Wednesdays and one could buy sweets, chocolates and toiletries there against coupons from the monthly pocket money of five to eight rupees given us by our parents. Nestle and Cadbury one-anna chocolate slabs contained pictures of the 'Stars of the Silver Screen' (later of dogs, horses and cars) and if you could fill a whole album you could get enlargements of photographs of your favourite stars. That is how Nelson Eddy, Deanna Durbin, Shirley Temple, Kanan Bala and Devika Rani entered our lives.

I was introduced to journalism through *The Doon School Weekly*, and rose to be one of the editors. I also served on the School Council, a miniature forum for local self-governance. The headmaster presided.

Prefects enjoyed the privilege of entertaining their counterparts from other Houses on special guest nights when delicacies such as Angels on Horseback (sliced boiled eggs on fried toast with a dash of ketchup) would be served and demolished with polished restraint. Then there was Golden Night, the last day of term, when a special supper and entertainment would be laid on in each House and we would bid farewell to those leaving school to seek fame and fortune in the wide world beyond.

Being in the Doon School soon gave each boy a new identity beyond caste, creed, region or rank. We became Indians. Most boys were called by something other than their own given name. The most famous and possibly the only 'dynastic' nickname in the history of the Doon School was reserved for every Bhargava who was, for some mysterious reason, known as 'Kaddu'. Perhaps the first Bhargava did look like that simple, honest, rotund, nutritious vegetable: the pumpkin.

*

Holidays could be a trifle lonely as the schedules did not altogether coincide with those of the local schools in Cuttack. But I did get in some football, which was also my favourite game at school, and was far and away the most popular sport, certainly in Eastern India in those days before television brought cricket to every household and every budding Tendulkar on to the street.

The rainy season was favoured for local league matches and I would go off to the maidan to watch the games, which were mostly played barefoot. The excitement was palpable. Armed with paper cones of peanuts and umbrellas to ward off untimely rain, the crowds would

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roar their approval or disdain and argue over the finer points of the match. Each team had its fans and if there was an arguable decision, irate spectators would invade the pitch and belabour the poor referee with their umbrellas or throw their slippers at him. I often wondered which was more exciting, the actual game or such interludes.

The long summer afternoons would be spent reading books. Arthur Mee's *The Book of Knowledge* was a veritable treasure trove of history, literature, science, travel and exploration, nature and religion and I must have read those twelve volumes from cover to cover. There were also the classics that one could buy for a few rupees from the Wheeler and Higginbotham railway bookstalls that were to be found on every major platform or junction.

Rail travel was a joy and an endless vista of discovery, especially if one travelled with other boys from school. The very names, the Bombay, Baroda and Central Indian Railway (BB&CI); Madras and Southern Maratha Railway (MSM); Great Indian Peninsular Railway (GIP) were magical. The steam engines exuded majesty. And one could watch the changing landscape to the music of the wheels clattering rat-a-ta-tak on the track, changing tone at intersections, while going over bridges or when passing an approaching train. And then the great hoot of the engine as the train would slow down and snake its way across multiple tracks as it entered a bustling junction. The platform would be teaming with peasants and patricians sitting on or carrying enormous tin trunks and bedrolls, while vendors darted to and fro selling an amazing assortment of food, fruit, beverages, crafts, toys, reading material, paan, beedi, cigarettes, and regional specialities. Fakirs and sundry entertainers would also compete for attention.

Hardwar was famous for rabri, Hapur for papad, Mathura for pedas and Sandhila, near Lucknow, for its laddus. These laddus were a special favourite and would be offered at a rupee for a handi of sixteen. If you bargained hard enough, the vendor would throw in one more laddu as soon as the guard blew his whistle and the train started pulling away. And what a feast would follow! The tea in earthen kullars or aloo puri at wayside halts were other delicacies and on the southern sections, biryani, vada-chutney and steaming coffee cooled and poured out and sold by the yard from and into gleaming stainless steel containers were always a delight.

Train travel was a way of life to be savoured by the minute. It was unhurried, educative, civilised. Now brash diesel-electric locos, impersonal vestibule trains with closed, tinted windows, and sanitised railway platforms have taken over. You can no longer fling a coin into

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the Ganga to earn merit while crossing the river at Benaras or be surprised by a cheerful monkey, one among a chatter of hundreds that might steal your lunch through an open window at Ayodhya, leaving you as red-faced as the thieving simian.

*

The school was shielded from politics but there was every sympathy for Indian aspirations. The impact of the War was evident with rationing, the loss of some British masters who joined up, and the enrolment of several school-leavers in the armed forces, something Foot encouraged as a necessary preparation for the New India.

I took my Senior Cambridge examination in the winter of 1942, but stayed on for another eighteen months doing the Allahabad Intermediate Board examinations. It was with considerable pride and nostalgia that I 'matriculated' from Doon. I am still haunted by the memory of being lulled to sleep by the band of the nearby Gurkha regimental centre and being awakened on crisp late spring mornings by the urgent warbling of the brain fever bird, moving up an octave in a rising crescendo, heralding the approach of summer. Time to rise and shine, it would sing insistently.

*

Came the summer of 1944, and school was suddenly behind me, my place there being taken by my brother John (Roshan). I headed for St Stephen's College in Delhi at a time when admissions were no problem. I opted for Economics Honours and chose to be in residence although my father had, by then, moved to Delhi. Living in college, I believed, was more fun and I would cycle home on weekends.

College was a new world, far more open and nothing as organised as school. Ragging was even then the order of the day. But since a number of Old Boys from Doon had been admitted to St Stephen's that year, we herded together in a united front that ensured minimal damage.

St Stephen's at that time was a community of some 450 students. It had no laboratories, so science students would walk next door to the university proper. The main building also housed the University Coffee House, ably managed by Arthur Moses, who played the organ at the Cathedral Church of the Redemption and, occasionally, at St James Church. The Coffee House was a convivial place and rivalled the college café. The café served good cutlets and hot toast and just outside it sat Sukhiya, the halwai, who would tirelessly seek to collect what were sometimes imaginary debts from one-time impecunious scholars, now Old Students.

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S.N. Mukharji, a mathematician, was principal of St Stephen's when I joined. He wore a somewhat stern exterior but was essentially a kindly man. Mrs Mukharji would host students for tennis in the court attached to the principal's bungalow. This would be followed by tea or lunch, after which there would be singing.

The college was a happy place. Raja Ram took over as principal with Mukharji's untimely passing away during my first year. K.C. Nag, taught Economics with S.K. Bose (junior), while the senior S.K. Bose (Philosophy) was an inveterate chain-smoker. Nag and 'Philo' Bose were lovely old-world professors. Lorrimer, like Samuel Mathai, taught English and would be bullied into holding classes out on the roof on bright winter mornings, the proceedings ending with 'Loch Lomond' or other Scottish airs, some of which I sang. Games and athletics were overseen by Bose Sahib and he would give me a couple of rupees to buy lemonade or other fizzy drinks for the college side when we played football where Delhi's ISBT now stands.

I felt that the college needed a channel of communication. Hence *The Midget*, a tabloid-sized, typewritten wall newspaper was posted up in 1945. I was the editor and have a copy of the second issue dated 21 March 1945. The editorial commented on a lament by the principal, Raja Ram, about the deterioration in college life in recent years, with cinemas and restaurants gaining ascendancy over other activities. Also reported was a visit by IAF officers to promote recruitment. The report concluded with the information that recruitment seemed to have gone down after it was announced that no Women's Auxiliary Air Force wing would be attached to the corps!

And so through 1945 into 1946. The college, like the Doon School, was shielded from politics, though it had a nationalist tradition through the former principal, S.K. Rudra, and C.F. Andrews' association with Gandhi and Tagore. The nationalist tumult grew in intensity with the end of the war. Cripps was followed by the Cabinet Mission. Pakistan was in the air, especially after Jinnah's call for Direct Action in 1946 set off a chain reaction of communal carnage. I attended one of Gandhi's wayside meetings and had Father arrange a Central Assembly pass for me on one occasion when Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Opposition, was in full flow. He spoke on South Africa and his oratory was compelling. My desultory newspaper reading essentially defined the limit of my political outreach. In the quiet confines of the college, Partition seemed a very distant, if at all likely, prospect.

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Foot had advised Father to send me to Cambridge and wrote to the Master of Trinity sponsoring my admission, as he did for other Old Boys. An admission letter followed and preparations commenced to obtain a passport and fit me out appropriately in the midst of wartime cloth rationing. It seemed practical to take a couple of Father's old English suits out of mothballs. He had outgrown those and now it was for the tailor to display his skills. My Uncle Tom in Calcutta made a similar contribution. Some old ties were thrown in and this sartorial exercise was truly topped off with the bestowal of Father's Liverpool felt hat, circa 1930. Fashions changed slowly in those days, and all who viewed the final fittings thought I looked quite dandy. My grandparents and the folk down south, including my sister Lulu and her husband Matthan in Bangalore, had to be visited, foreign exchange obtained, steamship tickets confirmed and the cabin trunk and suitcase properly packed and labelled.

There was the last send-off in Jamshedpur, and then, on to Bombay by rail where a converted liner-troopship awaited its passengers, mostly demobbed British soldiers returning home. A day in Bombay, and then the final drive to Ballard Estate to board the ship. The quay was crowded and lurking fears of robbery and worse were realised as I saw Father's felt hat bobbing up and down a bare five yards from me, with the gap steadily widening.

I elbowed my way forward fiercely and, with considerable effort, got to Felt Hat. And what should I discover under it but Jammy Rahim, ex-Dosco friend of my youth, wearing his father's felt hat, circa 1930 or 1920, what did it matter! He too was carrying his father's suits to Cambridge. We were like peas in a pod, young gentlemen ready to take on Cambridge. Before the ship's final siren sounded, we discovered at least two or three other Old Boys and felt greatly reassured by this jolly company. It was approaching dusk as the pilot led our liner through the channel into deeper waters. The lights of Bombay came on as the shoreline dimmed, and were soon out of sight.

We were literally cribbed, cabined and confined. Khaki was the dominant colour and there were relatively few women on board. It took about three or four days, almost up to Aden, before we could keep our food down and acquire sea-legs. That was when Dr Gupta of Allahabad University suggested we debate whether Akbar's Din-e-Elahi was a success! This had obviously been the subject of his PhD dissertation. Some of us babbled bravely, but Dr Gupta held forth until we were well into the Red Sea and approaching Suez.

Steaming through the Suez Canal, with the desert on both sides, was

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fascinating. There was a brief halt at the Ismailia crossing, and on to Port Said and the open waters of the Mediterranean. Gibraltar was the next landfall, and then the Atlantic.

We disembarked at Liverpool and, having collected our baggage, took the boat train to London. We arrived at King's Cross station in a couple of hours and searched for cabs to take us to the Indian Students' Hostel (ISH) and YMCA in Holburn where we had booked accommodation. It was getting dark and on approaching some people for directions, I was greeted by a buxom woman who exclaimed, 'What a lovely boy!' I was quick to make my escape to the ISH and the welcoming presence of its warden, Dr Masilamani.

We spent the next week in London, exploring the city and absorbing the sights and sounds, before going to Cambridge—Jammy to Pembroke, Bansi Dhar to St Catherine's, and I to Trinity. The head porter directed me to my tutor, Rattenbury, a Classics scholar, who introduced me to the college. I was temporarily assigned a room in Whewell's Court, across the street from the main gate and then allotted 'digs' a few furlongs away. I opened a bank account at Barclay's, invested in a bicycle and then shopped around for the regulation gown, college scarf and tie.

Cambridge was a lovely, small university town that grew on one. Trinity boasted an impressive Great Court and the magnificent Wren Library. The dining room was lined with portraits of famous alumni—Newton, Francis Bacon, Maxwell, Byron, Tennyson—who gazed down on the current crop of scholars, mostly just-demobilised ex-servicemen anxious to make up for lost time, as they ate their sparing post-war rations. Jawaharlal Nehru and Allama Mohammad Iqbal too had been at Trinity, and among contemporary dons were the Master, G.M. Trevelyan, as also Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein and A.H. Whitehead. The college 'backs' or rear lawns, alive with crocuses in spring, sloped down to the River Cam, a little stream that was hardly what we Indians would call a river but which, nevertheless, was a charming brook, lined with weeping willows, and crowded with punts.

Among the Indians/South Asians up at Cambridge at my time were many who earned great distinction later: I.G. Patel, S.D. Sharma (who went on to become President of India), Jagat Mehta and Romesh Bhandari (both foreign secretary in turn), Dharma Kumar (nee Venkatraman), editor of *The Cambridge Economic History of India, 1757-1970;* Abdus Salam (Nobel Laureate), Mohammad Afzal Khan and Jammy Rahim (Pakistan); and Neville Kanakaratne, later Sri Lanka's foreign secretary.

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I read Economics and wound up with a Lower Second. F.E. Smith, the future Lord Birkenhead, when asked of his grades had replied: 'I avoided the vulgar ostentation of a First, the obvious mediocrity of a Second, to retire into the decent obscurity of a Third.' I did just a notch better!

Holidays were spent travelling in Britain and around Europe. In the summer of 1947, I went to Scandinavia and was at a Danish summer folk high school at Helsingor (Hamlet's Elsinore) when India won freedom. Away from newspapers and the radio, I had forgotten the date, 15 August, until congratulated by the international friends I had made in that quiet, peaceful backwater, far removed from the gore and horrors of the Partition. I traversed Germany by train to spend the next couple of weeks as a back-packer, hitch-hiking through Holland, Belgium and France, getting lifts from friendly truckers and curious motorists, staying at youth hostels, enjoying the great monuments, galleries and concert halls in a Europe striving to build itself anew from the ruins of war.

*

I had been wondering what I should do after my Tripos. Teaching and becoming a UN civil servant seemed interesting options. A friend suggested I register myself at the Cambridge University Appointments Board and I, accordingly, trooped off to see its secretary, Guy. Having heard me out patiently, Guy informed me that *The Times of India*, Bombay, was on the lookout for an assistant editor and I might like to apply. The paper was in the process of changing hands and Bennett Coleman and Company was on the verge of signing a deal with Seth Ramakrishna Dalmia. The editor, Sir Francis Low, thought it would be a good idea to recruit one or two young British-educated Indian assistant editors who might help continue the paper's liberal tradition. Journalism being a somewhat unknown quantity, my immediate reaction was to say 'no'; but Guy wisely remarked that I need be in no hurry to make up my mind. Sir Francis was planning to visit the UK in a couple of months, and I might meet him and then decide.

I did not have the slightest notion as to what working for a newspaper entailed; but the idea grew on me. Sometime later, I readily agreed to an appointment when Guy wrote to say that Sir Francis would be visiting Cambridge the following week. The universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and the London School of Economics had been requested to short-list a few possible candidates. I was one of three from Cambridge, with Mahendra Desai and another. I had a pleasant conversation with

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Sir Francis, and Desai and I were selected. We were told that *The Times of India* would take us on with effect from 1 September 1948, and arrange for a year's internship with some British newspapers to help us learn the ropes before we formally started working in Bombay.

The examinations were soon over and it was farewell to Cambridge. I discovered *The Times of India* had negotiated for me to be with *The Glasgow Herald* for ten months and then to spend a couple of months in London with *The News Chronicle*. Mahendra was to go to *The Scotsman* in Edinburgh and then to *The Times*. We were given a fairly good stipend, my first earnings as it were.

I had never entered a newspaper office before and scarcely knew what to expect. *The Glasgow Herald*, a venerable but sturdy provincial paper, wore all the forbidding grime of post-War Glasgow, a busy industrial city known for its shipbuilding yards, steel mills and nearby coal fields, but was a most friendly establishment. I found lodgings a few miles away, by the university, and commuted by tram.

It had never occurred to me that morning papers were printed late at night and I was astonished to discover that work only commenced around four in the afternoon, with the shift continuing until well past midnight. The editor, Sir William Robieson, said I was to be put through the mill, starting with the (copy editor's) Desk and would then spend time with the reporters and, finally, join the leader writers who wrote the editorials, which were approved by the editor.

At the Desk, I was assigned to be an understudy to Alistair Hetherington, just demobilised from the British Army. The chief sub-editor, Anderson, and the other 'subs' were genial companions but it took me a while to understand their Scottish brogue. The chief sub and lesser copy-tasters would sort out teleprinter or own-correspondent 'stories' subject-wise, 'taste' them and then assign them to page editors dealing with local news, national affairs, international news, commerce, sport and so forth. Rejected copy would be 'spiked'. The subs would then edit the copy, which would be sent through a suction chute to the printers in the bowels of the basement, there to be set in hot metal type, proof-read and corrected.

These galley proofs or 'formes' would be returned to the Desk and be appropriately cut and pasted on to 'dummy' page sheets with occasional continuations. Page editors would then go down for the actual page make-up. This done, each page with its component of advertisements and photographs or a cartoon would be 'locked' in a 'stereotype' or metal frame, put in a matrix or die for casting to get a 'flong' or papier mache impression or mould, to be mounted, page-wise, on the cylindrical

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drums of the rotary machine. Tension would mount as the deadline approached as editors bustled and fought to ensure that all the news fit to print was suitably accommodated (including last minute 'flashes').

Finally, at a given signal, the rotary would roar to life and copies of the edition would cascade from the jaws of the giant machine, literally hot off the press. Only those who have watched the launch of a ship, the opening of a canal or a blast furnace pouring out molten iron can sense the excitement of the moment. I was fascinated. Today, things are very different. Computers and film have replaced hot metal. It's all very quiet, relatively clean and genteel. Printer's ink no longer flows in the veins of journalists and a newspaper office is today altogether another place.

The Desk is at the heart of a newspaper. Here sit the gatekeepers, unsung and unseen heroes who select the stories and pictures and chisel and shape the copy you read, often correcting the egregious errors of substance and style of reporters who get the by-lines. They are artists of page make-up and design, literally crafting the page and capturing the essential story in the headlines. I must, however, say I found reporting more exciting, as it allowed me to be footloose, fancy-free and able to indulge in that most basic of human emotions, curiosity, and the right to ask the five 'W's we all want to know: Why, Who, What, When and Where. I visited the courts but did no crime reporting, the basic beat for most, but spent my time doing 'development' reporting, visiting shipyards, coal mines, steel plants, the port and arguably Britain's most notorious slum, the Gorbels.

My final spell was with the leader writers or assistant editors as they are called in India, composing editorials. I was also assigned to the 'morgue' to update the Indian and Asian obituaries that had been prepared for emergency use and did, indeed, revise the obits on Nehru, Patel, Azad, Rajendra Prasad and Rajaji. I was editorially consulted on Asian topics in particular, and was filled with pride when I saw my first edit in print. But nothing pleased me more than the series of three long visionary op-ed pieces I wrote entitled, 'The Rebirth of Asia', where I argued that the ancient civilisations of South, South-east and East Asia, now rising Phoenix-like, would be a force to reckon with, and forecast an Asian century fifty years down the road.

London was different. I had a little over a month with *The News Chronicle*, a well regarded Liberal paper edited by Robert Cruikshank. Then followed a few weeks with *The Times of India*'s London bureau where a man called Miller held the fort. I met some of the Indian correspondents in London, K.S. Shelvankar and G. Parthasarathi among them, and Khuswant Singh, the PRO at India House.

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And then, it was time for me to return to India. I booked myself by rail from London to Paris and then by the Simplon-Orient Express via Geneva to Milan, Venice, Trieste, Sofia and Istanbul. Then on again by the Taurus Express to Ankara, Baghdad, Babylon and Ur to Basra.

Spending a few days at each halt, I made my way across war-torn Europe. At Sofia, I spent the day with Lyndon Clough who had taught me English at school and was now with the British Council. Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist leader and hero of the 1933 Berlin Reichstag fire, had died in Moscow and his body had been brought back to Sofia the previous day to lie in state before a grand funeral. All through Bulgaria, everything was draped in black and piped funereal music could be heard everywhere. Clough received me warmly and drove me off to his home for a meal, and then to a lovely Orthodox monastery atop a hill, several miles out of Sofia. We returned in time for supper before I boarded the train for Istanbul.

I was entranced by Istanbul, its history, monuments and its situation on the Bosporus straddling Europe and Asia, striving to be part of both. And so across the Anatolian plateau to Ankara, and then to Baghdad and on to Basra, taking in Babylon and Ur on the way, soaking up history. From there I sailed to Karachi for a few days' stay with Jammy Rahim and, days later, docked in Bombay.

I thought I might visit *The Times of India* office before going down to Kerala and Bangalore to visit my parents and family. And so, dressed in a pink shirt and blue corduroy trousers, I called on Ivor Jehu who had succeeded Francis Low as editor.

'You're rather colourfully dressed, aren't you,' said Jehu. I did not disagree. And then, 'I'm informed by Robieson, (editor of *The Glasgow Herald*) that your spelling is appalling.' I took the blow on the chin and entrained for Cochin en route to Tiruvalla for some healing fish and *appams* that I knew would be awaiting me. I was not wrong. It was great being home. Only, Grandfather was no longer there.

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3

THE NEHRU ERA: TO WORK, TO WORK

I returned home from Britain in 1949 to an Independent India. I had missed the actual event in 1947, but it was exhilarating to be in this new environment. Expectations were high. Hopes soared higher.

In Tiruvalla, my parents were settled in the new family home, Muthoor Vilas, carved out of the Pearl Moor estate. Grandfather was gone but Grandmother still remained a commanding presence, and Pearl Moor continued to draw the extended family together. More independent family mansions had sprouted over 'Pension Kunnu' or Pension Hill, as this part of Kuttupuzha panchayat was known, and so there were more homes to visit. That was followed by some days in Kottayam, to catch up with the Pannampunna branch of the maternal family.

Then back to Bombay, to launch my career in journalism . . . very different from the family tradition of medicine, civil service, business and the rest. I moved into a room in Dar-ul-Habib on Marine Drive, a pleasant hostel patronised mostly by young bachelors and couples starting out in life, and even a budding film star like Prem Nath. There were also rich Arab guests from the Gulf. Many of them would promenade up and down the sea front during the monsoon, or ride a victoria (a horse drawn carriage), delighting in the rain, a rare visitor to their own lands. This was before the discovery of oil and gas reversed the tide. Staunch friendships developed and we were a jolly, carefree group of young bloods at Rub-a-Dub, as the place was popularly known, since it matched the comforts available to the Three Men in a Tub and certainly included as varied a clientele.

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The Times of India was located at Bori Bunder, a name redolent of the time when Bombay's seven islands were being patiently connected through a steady process of reclamation. The configuration of the city kept changing as creeks were closed, islets joined and land reclaimed, causing jetties or bunders to sprout for purposes of communication and commerce. Thus Bori Bunder was soon to be flanked by the ornately grand Victoria Terminus (now a World Heritage site renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and the scene of one of the ghastly 26/11 massacres). Opposite was the Bombay Municipal Corporation and, beside it, *The Times of India*. How and when *The Times* came to be known as the Old Lady of Bori Bunder is not certain; but there it stood, staid and sedate, keeping watch over the fortunes of a burgeoning metropolis, Gateway to India and the world beyond.

Among my colleagues at *The Times* were N.J. Nanporia, G.G. Gokhale, R.K. Laxman, and D.F. Thomas. The editor, Ivor Jehu, was soon to leave and a war of succession had started. In the absence abroad of Frank Moraes, who had been regarded as the natural successor, Ramakrishna Dalmia, the first Indian owner of Bennett Coleman, which also published *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (under Shawn Mandy), decided to bring in R. Gopalaswami, formerly a columnist with the paper but now editing a new venture, *Bharat*. The arrangement did not last long and Gopalaswami was followed by Lala Feroz Chand, of the Servants of India Society, a gentle Gandhian. He too did not last, but it was in his time that *The Times of India* was launched from Delhi.

Dalmia, an established industrialist, attached great importance to preventing cow slaughter and spoke of reforming India and the world. Unfortunately for him, he overreached himself financially and surrendered Bennett Coleman in mortgage to his son-in-law Shanti Prasad Jain, a rising industrialist who brought to bear a more sober and moderate approach to his role as a leading publisher. This turn of the tide brought Frank Moraes back to *The Times* as editor. Frank was a charming man and an eloquent writer. He did not bother too much about the nitty-gritty of running the paper, which he left to his deputies. I got on famously with him as I had done with Jehu and the others, and applied myself to writing edits and shorter notes or Topics. I, however, much preferred reporting and, before long, approached Moraes with a request for a transfer to the New Delhi news bureau.

Bombay was fun. And certain memories stand out. The first was the 1949 flood, a late September or October deluge that swamped the city, which received something like twenty-four inches of rain in thirty-six hours. With the tide in, drainage was intermittently choked and the

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whole place was literally afloat. I recall wading to the office from Dar-ul-Habib on Marine Drive in waist deep water, with a change of clothing and a pair of spare sandals and a towel in a satchel slung around my neck. Boats were out in every street, ferrying the very young and the elderly, or filled with merrymakers enjoying a Venetian holiday. Bori Bunder had come into its own. I made it to *The Times*, past the Bombay Gymkhana and Dhobi Talao, both under a sea of water. Most trains were suspended. Maybe, those in the earlier shifts just stayed on as few workers could go home or reach the office from the suburbs. *The Times* came out the next morning.

Then there is the indelible memory of Republic Day, 1950. From late evening onwards on 25 January, people started gathering at well-known landmarks—Flora Fountain, the Gateway of India, the Regal, Churchgate, Marine Drive, Chowpatty, Shivaji Park and so on—throughout the city. Buildings were illuminated and streets festooned. The suburban trains were choked, with people standing dangerously on footboards and couplings and perched on the roofs of mainline, steam-driven trains. Bands were playing and there were fireworks and dancing in the streets.

I set out for the Gateway with friends. By eleven o'clock, it was difficult to move, so dense was the throng. The harbour was ablaze with light with every ship, tug, barge and buoy lit up. As midnight tolled, ships, locomotives and factories sounded their sirens, building residents crowding balconies, windows and rooftops beat thalis and gongs in thunderous celebration, to the singing of 'Jana gana mana' and cries of Jai Hind. A naval salvo saluted the Republic. It was a deeply emotional and magical moment of pride, hope, joy and utter abandon as an entire city, indeed the entire nation, greeted the promise of the new Constitution. Stranger embraced stranger. The festivities stretched into the early hours. The morrow would not merely be another day—it heralded another era.

The commitment to a liberal democracy enshrined in the new Constitution was truly revolutionary, although the significance of this has been little understood. Until then, the historical sequence was that nations the world over had graduated to full democratic and electoral freedom at the end of long decades of social and economic advancement and political maturation. This was true of Britain and Europe and even, to some extent, of the United States where African-Americans won their civil rights only in the 1960s. The Congress Party, however, was pledged to democracy from the start as that was the only way to ensure the nation's unity and harmony, given its manifold diversity. Nevertheless, history was stood on its head in 1950 when India ordained that

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democracy with the full panoply of Fundamental Rights would be the instrument and not the outcome of a social and economic revolution, a notable contribution to democratic theory and practice.

On 26 January, India became a Republic while remaining part of the Commonwealth. Others followed suit. Were it not for India's lead, the Commonwealth would have been a mere shadow of itself.

Bombay, in 1950, claimed to be the nation's first city, a status that Calcutta spiritedly challenged. It was bustling and cosmopolitan. But it had its slums and blighted areas. One of the most noisome of these was the Matunga Labour Camp, a large concentration of squatters and refugees. Visiting the camp with the chairperson of the Women's Welfare Association (WWA), Mrs Bakhale, wife of the chief secretary, and Mrs Trity Talyarkhan, a prominent social worker, I was assailed by a sense of outrage and guilt and felt something must be done to ameliorate the conditions there. Since the WWA's work was hampered by lack of funds, I discussed this with my colleagues including our film critic, Yashodhara Katju, and we decided to organise a charity concert with film stars on stage. Begum Para and Prem Nath (of Rub-a-Dub) were among those who responded and Mohammad Rafi agreed to sing. The programme, 'April Showers', was a modest success. The net collections made some little difference to the camp and helped stir the public conscience.

I had my first introduction to Mando Goan folk singing at the time, and was enchanted by its lilt and rhythm. Dining with friends at Irani restaurants was another treat. The George at Kala Ghoda and the Coronation at Lamington Road were famous for their murg masalam. The marble-top tables would be wiped clean with a wet towel. Orders would be bawled out and communicated with stentorian clarity to the kitchen, and to anyone else who cared to listen within a radius of half a mile. Clients skimping on an order risked being put to public shame, and so most people ate well and the Irani restaurants did good business. The meals were delicious and one was prepared to give the benefit of the doubt to claims that these establishments existed By Appointment to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, and European royalty, all of whom appeared to have a palate for Indian curries and pickles.

Bombay Presidency was at that time, with Madras, in the forefront of prohibition. B.G. Kher was chief minister but the moving spirit was the home minister, Morarji Desai. The ban was hugely unpopular and evasion, already widespread, was aggravated by a system of licensed permits on medical grounds. Overnight, Bombay residents, including politicians, bureaucrats and professionals, were afflicted by a grave and

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mysterious pandemic against which the only prophylactic appeared to be a tot of whiskey or rum, or even beer, taken at least once a day before bedtime. Doctors were much sought after and permits were issued for the asking. Senior civil and police officials were among the prime law breakers, and bootleggers came to terms with the police and excise officials on a mutually agreed basis of live and let live. Illicit liquor stills sprang up and poisonous brews took a heavy toll. Dadas and protection rackets also came into existence and society was criminalised, spawning an underworld with links to national and international crime syndicates.

It is my firm belief that prohibition undermined respect for law and the criminal justice system. Everybody drank. Like ripples in the pond, the influence of money and muscle power grew exponentially. Soon, mafia dons began to dictate terms and it was not long before corrupt king-makers determined to become kings themselves—as MLAs, MPs, ministers. The 'system' lost moral authority. Thus commenced a deep rot that continues. Prohibition did little to curb drunkenness and related social ills, and other ways by which the problem could have been tackled were not resolutely pursued. Prohibition may have had marginal benefits, but it certainly hurt India cruelly at an early stage of nation-building and has left behind an ugly scar.

Beyond, the world was astir. The Korean War had broken out. There was civil strife in Burma. The Palestine-Israel conflict continued. The People's Republic of China had assumed control in Peking and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) stood poised to march into Tibet. Diplomatic efforts were afoot to secure a peaceful settlement. It was in this context that I wrote my first ever edit page article in the autumn of 1950, arguing in favour of an autonomous Tibet within China, which Peking proposed. I also warned of the security implications for India as Chinese claims seemed to extend beyond the Himalayan rampart, which was by no means an impenetrable barrier, as widely assumed.

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As the year-end approached, Moraes nominated me to represent *The Times* as a member of an Indian press delegation to Egypt. This was an Egypt in decline under Nahas Pasha and the Wafd, reeling under the weight of feudalism and corruption and soon to be overthrown by Gamal Abdel Nasser who, with Tito of Yugoslavia and Nehru, laid the foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in association with men like U Nu (Burma), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) and Sukarno (Indonesia).

Egypt, however, was fascinating. We visited Luxor and Karnak and marvelled at the panorama of a great civilisation and the recently

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excavated treasures of Tutankhamen, laid out in the National Museum in Cairo. 'Stones, more stones, Verghese,' exclaimed a weary Tushar Babu, editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, as we gazed at a magnificent Ramses colonnade.

*

On my return to Bombay, I was informed of my transfer to Delhi. That was a lovely surprise. I joined *The Times* New Delhi bureau as a special correspondent early in 1951. Delhi was vibrant, but still relatively small and very much a city of bureaucrats, with little of its current cosmopolitan character or enormous spread.

The Times had arranged a room for me at Constitution House on Curzon Road (Kasturba Gandhi Marg), where the Curzon Road Apartments now stand. It was a government hostel that got its name from the fact that a number of Constituent Assembly members lived there. Indeed, among my neighbours was H.V. Kamath, an irrepressible gadfly who enlivened parliamentary proceedings by his caustic barbs against the government. Thus he commended Delhi's Joint Water and Sewage Board for carefully delivering the city what its name proclaimed, a mix of half water, half sewage! Just down the road was the Constitution Club (now Asia House), a meeting place for MPs, and at 30 Ferozshah Road, the Diwan Chand Information Centre, a library and hall that MPs used as a reading room and meeting hall (now Diwan Shree Apartments, where I live).

Constitution House did not quite live up to its grand name but it was a friendly place. Under the protection of a mosquito net, one could sleep out on the lawns, between the rows of rooms. K.N. Raj, with the Planning Commission; Sharad Marathe, then with FICCI before joining the government and rising to become Secretary for Industry; B.N. Datar, of the Labour Ministry; and for a while, K.R. Narayanan, later President of India; and I made up a 'gang of five'. We had all just arrived in Delhi and needed suitable apparel for the approaching summer. We decided that it would be economical to buy a bale of twill for shirting and a bale of white makhanzeen or satin duck for trousers. The senior economists made the purchase from Chandni Chowk while Datar sahib, with his experience in labour matters, engaged a reliable tailor. The fashion of the times was white on white as this was said to be a 'cooling' combination, if dhobi costs were set aside. The cloth was duly shrunk, the tailor summoned, measurements taken and collar styles discussed. The masterji airily dismissed suggestions for a trial before final delivery. After all, he had put shirts on prouder backs than ours.

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The great day arrived. I was able to struggle into the trousers but the shirts revealed one sleeve to be longer than the other. The tailor looked at me, long and sadly, and finally pronounced that one of my arms was longer than the other. I was flabbergasted to learn of this anatomical abnormality, but was comforted by the masterji's parting advice that a proper posture was capable of curing many a defect.

My colleagues at *The Times* bureau, Subbaroyan, Subhan, Kumud Khanna and Inderjit were welcoming. I was assigned to cover Parliament, the Planning Commission and development ministries. This work allocation was after my own heart. Parliament at that time was the font of news, and the standard of debates was truly high. I sat beside Inder Malhotra. Members were erudite, came well prepared and heard each other out with decorum and respect. Not that the proceedings were dull. The topics were of interest as the Constitution was being chiselled and shoe-horned into legislation, in the making of the new Republic. Development too was news, with Nehru describing the rising dams and factories as the Temples of Modern India.

The media world in Delhi was not as crowded then as it is today. AIR was the sole electronic component. Among the newspapers, *The Times* and *The Hindustan Times* along with their Hindi counterparts, and *The Statesman* led the field. Among the doyens of the Delhi press corps were Durga Das (*HT*), Sri Krishna (*Capital*), P.D. Sharma (*The Indian Express*), Krishnalal Shridharani (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*), Ramachandran (PTI), K. Rangaswami (*The Hindu*), Prem Bhatia (*The Statesman*), Chalapathi Rao (*National Herald*), K. Shankar (*Shankar's Weekly*), B. Shiva Rao (of *The Hindu*, an elder statesman) and J.N. Sahni. Melville DeMellow was AIR's star commentator while Roshan Menon, Pamela Krishan, Surojit Sen and Latika Ratnam read the news. Charles Fabri and Amita Malik were the leading art and radio/film critics, respectively.

International interest in India was exemplified by the number of foreign correspondents stationed in Delhi. They were men and women of distinction who subsequently rose to greater heights. Abe Rosenthal and Joe Lelyveld, both went on to become editors of *The New York Times*, while Sidney Schanberg made a name for himself in Vietnam. Mark Tully came a little later to report for the BBC. It was a highly competitive but happy fraternity. Government appointments were considered scoops and there was little 'investigative journalism' as everything came before Parliament, which was the font of news and the forum where 'scandals' were uncovered.

The Times bureau was located in the hutments on Ferozshah Road, where Rabindra Bhavan now stands, while its main office was off

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Ansari Road. Trams plied from Kashmere Gate to Daryaganj and down Chandni Chowk. The 'Fleet Street' along Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg was still in the future. Everything east of Ferozshah Kotla more or less belonged to the river.

I had barely settled down to my routine when events plucked me away to cover two interesting assignments. A popular revolt against hereditary Rana rule in Nepal (under the leadership of B.P. Koirala and the Nepali Congress) caused King Tribhuvan to flee to Delhi, in 1950. Rana resistance, however, was soon overcome and the king and his entourage, including the queen, crown princes and princesses and their children, took off ceremonially from Safdarjang airport, to return home in triumph. Some smart insider trading aided by Sudarshan Mehta (a Dosco and now private secretary to His Majesty) enabled me to cadge a seat on the aircraft carrying the royal baggage!

It was a fine day and we had a stunning bird's eye view of Kathmandu Valley as the aircraft circled Gaucher 'airport', then just a meadow, before landing. The whole city and surrounding countryside was bedecked and the populace thronged the route to Gaucher, with men, women and children atop every roof, tree and vantage point, flags in hand. No monarch could have been more warmly greeted. What a contrast to the manner in which his grandson, Gyanendra, exited the political scene! This was possibly the first aircraft landing in Nepal and the excitement was palpable. The touchdown was delayed as two graziers, alarmed by the sight of the iron birds, squatted in the middle of the 'runway' with their livestock and had to be shooed away.

There were thunderous cheers as the king alighted to a gun salute, a guard of honour and a formal welcome by Mohan Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, the Teen Sarkar who paid obeisance to his liege, the Panch Sarkar. The cavalcade was lustily cheered and greeted with flowers and decorative arches. The city was at that time quite small and was dotted with Rana palaces, with fortified gates, flanked by personal guards boasting a most flamboyant heraldry and ancient arms, giving all the appearance of a great fancy dress parade. And so to the gates of the massive Singha Durbar, the seat of government. A king had come home.

Keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings was Chandrashekhar Prasad Narain Singh, eminence grise and Indian ambassador. I was lodged in one of the outhouses of the embassy, a key location. The following day the new government was sworn in with Maitrika Prasad Koirala as prime minister. A new era had opened.

There was no way to return but on foot. I took one of the only two

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cars for hire in Kathmandu, a swanky old Bentley, to Thankot, at the edge of the Valley. From there it was a day's walk over the mountains to Bhimpheri, then by bus to Amlekganj and thence by a metre gauge train to Raxaul, the Indian railhead. From there to Sonepur, and then across the Ganges by ferry to Patna and finally on to Delhi.

Five decades later, Nepal's 239-year-old monarchy stands abolished. The kingdom has become a Republic. I had met King Birendra in 2001 when he sought more arms aid to combat the Maoist uprising, and duly passed on the message to the foreign minister, Jaswant Singh.

The next assignment followed shortly thereafter. Jammu and Kashmir had held its general elections and its Constituent Assembly was ready to adopt its Objectives Resolution. I was sent to cover the event along with our Srinagar correspondent, Sati Sahni. This was my introduction to Kashmir and Sheikh Abdullah. He was then at the peak of his popularity, especially after having lived up to his promise to usher in 'Naya Kashmir' by legislating the J&K Large Estates Abolition Act, which remains the best land reform programme undertaken anywhere in India. The Sheikh had a commanding presence and was, I believe, a genuine nationalist. Handled differently, he would not have veered off course. He was alarmed by signs of rising communalism in India, a manifestation of which was the Jana Sangh-RSS agitation in Jammu where its leader, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, a most able parliamentarian, unfortunately took ill and died, triggering violence and tensions in the state.

*

It would perhaps be appropriate to step back and examine the milieu which India had entered post-Partition, and the stage on which the new developments I was now reporting were playing out. (This is personalised, potted history at second-hand with all its obvious pitfalls.) The physical and emotional consequences of Partition were painfully evident, especially in the north and certainly in Delhi. There were refugees everywhere and countless families and whole communities were emotionally traumatised by the terrible killings and the largest two-way migration in human history. The wounds took almost three generations to heal.

Was Partition necessary? Could it have been avoided? Perhaps ... until 1946, when Jinnah's call to Direct Action led to the Calcutta killings and a revenge round in Bihar. Thereafter, fear and hatred so developed a life and momentum of their own that leaders, who may have only been playing games of bluff until then, found the play had

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exceeded the plot, and was unfolding inexorably. The British had even earlier gamed post-withdrawal scenarios that would use India if possible and its partitioned north-west and eastern flanks to defend their strategic interests in the Middle East and South-east Asia and 'contain' the onward march of Communism. India declined this role, and Pakistan became the default frontline state in the new Great Game.

Lord Mountbatten did not help matters by rashly advancing the date of Independence by almost a year, to August 1947. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, ignorant and untutored, came to draw a line and then hastily took the first plane home before he could be questioned. Worse, Mountbatten did not disclose Radcliffe's 'line' to those that should have been told. The governors of UP and Punjab were, in particular, insistent on being briefed as they had made it plain that they feared a blood bath, and had to know where and how they must deploy their forces to mitigate if not prevent a disaster.

Seldom has a supreme commander so betrayed his charge. He was determined that the transfer of power be completed without a blot on his stewardship. Let Independent India take the rap for any consequences. Here was a vainglorious pro-consul eager to become First Lord of the Admiralty back home, and be rewarded with a state funeral (for which he kept planning in petty detail until the end). Yet, incredibly, Nehru asked the new governor general to chair the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, an offer that he accepted and exploited against India's best interests in Kashmir.*

How and why the Cabinet never questioned the choice of Mountbatten as the de facto operational head of Independent India's defence and foreign policy establishment at a most critical and formative period of its history is mystifying. Even more astonishing is the fact that the whole issue has been glossed over, if at all mentioned, by Nehru's biographers and others.

Gandhiji had been sidelined after 1946. Jinnah too had partly lost control over events and was driven by ambition and the knowledge that his failing health left him little time. History will judge him too; but he was essentially a secular nationalist who used the 'two-nation' theory as a tactic, only to discover that he could not dismount the tiger he had chosen to ride. He did try and steer Pakistan towards a secular path in

*This tale has been told by Chandrashekhar Dasgupta in *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir* (Delhi: Sage, 2002) based on British archival papers, and Narendra Singh Sarila, in *The Shadow of the Great Game, the Untold Story of India's Partition* (Delhi: HarperCollins, 2005).

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his address to the country's Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, when he declared religion to be a personal matter, of no concern to the state. He saw the fundamental illogic of the two-nation theory, but alas, the realisation came too late. His speech was virtually ignored by his own government and he reverted to type some months later when he called on Pakistan's constitution-makers to adopt the Shariah as the foundation of a modern Islamic state.

The League elites who migrated from India to Pakistan found they had been uprooted from their homes and hearths and were settled in areas where they were regarded as mohajirs or refugees. On the other hand, as many Muslims were left behind in India as there were in either West Pakistan or what became Bangladesh, where linguistic nationalism triumphed over Islamic nationalism. Jammu and Kashmir, however, has remained a bone of contention for Pakistan. But of that, more later.

Parallel with the run up to Independence was the process of accession and the integration of some 600 princely states, a monumental exercise skilfully and largely peacefully accomplished by Sardar Patel and his special secretary, V.P. Menon.

*

Nehru, an old-fashioned Fabian socialist, had been much taken with Soviet style planning and had chaired a pre-Independence National Planning Commission set up by the Congress. Separately, a group of industrialists led by J.R.D. Tata and G.D. Birla proposed a Bombay Plan for India's economic regeneration. Both were visionary documents and it was left to the proposed new Planning Commission to frame the First Plan. John Mathai, then finance minister, objected to the idea and resigned, as centralised planning would, in his judgment, impinge on states' rights. The commission, however, proceeded with its task under V.T. Krishnamachari, the first deputy chairman, and Tarlok Singh, joint secretary, indefatigable, unfazed and smiling, who epitomised the soul of Indian planning over the next two decades.

Nehru's vision of building a new India was captured in his slogan, *'Aaraam haraam hai'* (Idleness is sin). The First Five-Year Plan, 1951-56, was hurriedly put together and at best constituted an aggregation of ongoing programmes, the new elements being a major push towards water resource development—Bhakra Nangal, Damodar Valley (the DVC) and Hirakud. Two public sector ventures, Sindri Fertilisers and the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works, were started, as also programmes for Community Development and the National Extension Service. Efforts were also made to promote mass housing through pre-fabrication, for

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which the Hindustan Housing Factory was set up near Badarpur, in Delhi.

I set out to report on these developments, starting with the Etawah, Nilokhri, Faridabad experiments which constituted the basis of the community development programme. This resulted in a series of four edit pager articles entitled, 'Experiments in Living', starting with Faridabad where Sudhir Ghosh (who had been used by Gandhi to carry messages to the viceroy), had chalked out plans to help people rise again from the ashes of the Partition. Delhi's old fort or Purana Qila housed an overflowing rehabilitation camp crowded with thousands of urban Hindu migrants from the North West Frontier Provinces (NWFP). The site was becoming untenable. What was to be their future? Those once proud shopkeepers and traders were on the dole, hopeless, helpless and not knowing what to do or where to go.

Ghosh, encouraged by that inspirational lady, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and assisted by Lakshmi Chand Jain of the Indian Cooperative Union, decided to put these people to work to rebuild their lives. They were offered tented accommodation near Faridabad from where Ghosh persuaded 30,000 Hindu Pathans in the camp to take up spades and shovels, cross to the west of the Delhi-Agra railway track and dirty their hands by building homes for themselves. They were trained as masons, carpenters, welders or whatever, and backed by a few professionals. Within three years a modest Faridabad township was up and running, with housing, utilities, social infrastructure and, most important, an unwanted power plant shipped from Hamburg as part of India's share of German war reparations. It was meticulously put together, without drawings, by an engineer who had once been an operative of that power station, whom Ghosh had somehow managed to track down. Then, as now, if energy was available, industries sprouted. Bata set up a shoe factory. Others followed. Faridabad was on its way.

At Kurukshetra, ninety miles north of Delhi, was another refugee camp. There S.K. Dey, later minister for community development and panchayati raj, but then a young US-trained engineer led 7000 men, women and children into the wilderness of Nilokheri, where there was cultivable wasteland. Within 3 years, the scrub and jungle had been cleared, swamps drained, snakes and wild pig driven away. Another home-made township had sprung up, with workers' cooperative enterprises, a technical training centre and a 700-acre farm around it. Official refugee relief budgets and private savings went to build Faridabad and Nilokheri.

The rehabilitation of Partition refugees was a Herculean task. Apart

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from the trauma of the barbarous killings, separation and abductions on both sides, there was the question of assessing and paying compensation (a hugely laborious task), restoring people's livelihood and getting them off the dole. There was a fairly even exchange of rural populations between the two parts of Punjab, and this facilitated something of a land-for-land exchange. Nevertheless, the relatively more arid and undeveloped region of East Punjab (including what is now Haryana), needed irrigation that came, in due course, from the Bhakra-Pong storages and the southern Haryana lift system, which pumped canal water to the plateau beyond. Bhakra provided electricity for pumping groundwater and, gradually, the countryside was no longer dark at night but dotted with lights, marking the spread of rural electrification. Better seeds, farm research and extension through the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, laid the groundwork for the Green Revolution to follow, with first generation Punjabi emigrants to the UK sending back remittances to augment tubewell bores.

Urban rehabilitation was a more difficult task and took longer to accomplish. Still, Sindhi refugees, mostly urban, went to Bombay and by dint of their entrepreneurial bent were soon rehabilitated in business and manufacture. Ulhasnagar became a hub of Sindhi enterprise.

There was little migration from East Pakistan initially, but this followed like a tidal wave in 1949-50, after delayed riots. Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart, Liaqat Ali Khan, signed a pact that postulated the assisted return of those refugees to their 'native place'. That proved to be an idle hope. In fact many more migrated, over the ensuing years, and were herded into crowded camps, mostly around Calcutta. There they provided plentiful rent-a-crowd political fodder for the Communists who preferred to keep them in their miserable condition rather than allow them to be relocated in Orissa and Bihar. The annual ten-crore-rupee rehabilitation budget of the West Bengal government had meanwhile become a comfortable nest egg for contractors and others who were chary of losing this bounty.

The Bengali immigrants lacked the spirit of the Punjabi refugees, who were determined to make good anywhere and ensure that they were soon better off than before. Large terai tracts were cleared in Uttar Pradesh for setting up refugee colonies. I visited several of these sites, with Punjabi villages on one side of the road and Bengali settlements on the other. The contrast could not have been more striking. The Punjabis had got down to the task with enthusiasm, and their bustling villages and farms exuded an air of emerging prosperity. The Bengali villages presented a very different picture of gloom, truancy, dependency and despair.

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In the late 1950s, in its search for more land on which to resettle the Bengali refugees crowding Calcutta, the Centre 'discovered' Dandakaranya, a 30,000 square mile expanse of forest and mineral rich plateau spread over the Bastar, Kalahandi and Koraput districts of Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa and some adjacent Agency tracts spilling into Andhra. This, if added to the project zone, would have increased its dimensions to around 80,000 square miles, with an existing population of barely three million, mostly tribal.

I visited the first project site at Pharasgaon, headquarters of the newly formed Dandakaranya Development Authority headed by a dynamic Haryana administrator, A.L. Fletcher. The Central Tractor Organisation had already cleared 1400 acres of the 7000 acres set aside for the Pharasgaon reclamation zone where refugees and tribals were to be allocated 7 acres apiece, half of this irrigated. The catch lay in the fact that reclamation and infrastructure development were to be undertaken by the beneficiaries themselves on the Nilokheri-Faridabad model. The tribals were not interested as this would have meant a change in their way of life. The Bengali refugees were apathetic. Little progress was made and the project died. Some years later, the World Bank came up with a proposal that the sal forests be felled and the whole region planted with quick maturing blue pine to provide softwood for giant pulping mills. The idea aroused considerable opposition and was scrapped.

*

The community development (CD) programme, that was to lay the foundation for India's rural future, was developed around another model designed by an American town planer, Albert Meyer, who, in the course of his military tours, visited rural India and found a tremendous mismatch between potential, need and actual living conditions. He concluded that official departments were poorly structured to provide the necessary thrust for development. There was a need for trained multi-purpose, village-level extension workers (VLWs), capable of acting as agents of change at the grassroots, under the supervision of block development officers (BDOs), aided by specialists in irrigation, animal husbandry, health and so on. A pilot project launched in ninety-seven villages near Etawah proved successful as agricultural extension was married to social development (education, health, gender empowerment) and change.

Nehru was enthusiastic. The Ford Foundation, under Douglas Ensminger, then far larger and possibly more influential than the US

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embassy led by a highly supportive ambassador, Chester Bowles, provided strong funding and technical support. I was greatly impressed and wrote glowingly of what I had seen. The theory underlying the First Plan then was that CD blocks would be supported and sustained by a number of Nilokheris, which in turn would develop links with a series of larger industrialising and technically more advanced Faridabads in a great pyramid of bottom-up development. This would require careful planning, sound execution and political will. I concluded my series: 'Ideas have legs. Example has wings'.

About that time, a Mrs Bruce Gould, editor of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, a leading American publication, was visiting India and wanted to know more about Etawah. Tourist Escorts, a travel agency started by an enterprising young woman, Leela Shukla, engaged students and other young people as escorts who could conduct up-market tourists around and engage them with more than the usual tourist chatter. Mrs Gould had done the circuit with Tourist Escorts and had asked her guide, Jamila Barakatullah, Leela Shukla's younger sister, to tell her something about the Etawah experiment. Mrs Gould would not be diverted and so Jamila promised to find out about it. Casting around, she was informed by a mutual friend, Munta Thomas, to ask Georgie. I invited Jamila to lunch at Gaylord's, and there over the fish course explained to this absolutely gorgeous creature, with a trademark flower in her hair, what Etawah was about. I also gave her a reprint of my articles, which probably reached Mrs Gould, who asked no more questions.

There followed visits to Leela Shukla and her husband Victor, at their flat in Connaught Place to meet Jamila. The courtship blossomed. There were picnics at Siri Fort, the Qutab, Tughlakabad and Okhla in what was then open country with yellow mustard fields. The Patiala Band's vigorous rendering of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony* one evening generated courage enough to propose. We got engaged in mid-1952. The rest, as they say, is history. I took Jamila along to see a movie with Mahinder (Kali) Lall, an old Doon friend. I forget the name of the film. But I do remember Kali's parting remark. He said, 'George, you've picked a winner.' He was right.

Reverend Barakatullah, a convert from Islam, was archdeacon of the Amritsar diocese. The family was from Punjab where he had served until Partition, while Sarah, whom he married, came from Dehra Dun. Jamila had studied in Kinnaird School and College, in Lahore, come away to Delhi in August 1947, and then joined St John's College, Agra, for her MA.

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My parents and siblings knew nothing about Jamila until I wrote and invited them to the wedding to be held in Dalhousie, at the Barakatullah's summer retreat. They were taken by surprise, but any apprehensions about an 'out of the community' marriage were soon dispelled. They all came to the wedding, which was celebrated on 19 September 1952, which was also both Jamila and her sister Leela's birthday. It was a happy event in the most pleasant surroundings, and the service was performed by Jamila's father. That was the last wedding performed in St. John's Church, Dalhousie, until the late 1980s, as I was informed by my brother, Roshan, who visited Dalhousie and asked to see the church register. We motored to Kashmir for our honeymoon. The weather was cold and wet in Pahalgam and we were quite frozen, but enjoyed our subsequent sojourn in a houseboat on Nagin Lake in Srinagar.

*

Jack Gibson had inculcated in me a considerable interest in geography since my days at the Doon School. I was, therefore, delighted to be assigned a development story when I returned to work, and lost no time in visiting the great river valley projects under construction. I soon noticed the difference between words and action, precept and example, plans and projects, an India that talked and an India that laboured and toiled. The Bhakra Dam symbolised the nation's resolve to build north-western India's rural prosperity anew, after the loss of the flourishing canal colonies of Punjab and Sind. The Indus Treaty was not concluded until 1960 but the broad contours of a settlement had emerged, enabling India to proceed with the key Bhakra Dam. I reported on the negotiations over the years, with N.D. Gulati deftly steering the Indian side. Eugene Black, the World Bank president and David Lilienthal, former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority who had been called in to advise, had advocated joint development and management of the Indus system by India and Pakistan, as a single system. That ideal was, however, far removed from realisation as a wall of mistrust divided the two sides.

Some scoffed at the Bhakra, labelling it a white elephant and wondering where all its promised power was going to be consumed. They were to be mightily surprised. I paid several visits to the dam and canal sites reporting on the progress of the construction, as well as on Bilaspur town, which was soon to be submerged. Work on the resettlement of those displaced proceeded apace. There was dust and din everywhere, to the roar and snarl of heavy earth-moving equipment, cranes, drills and dumpers; cutting, scraping, digging, carrying and sculpting a new architecture out of the seeming chaos. Then, finally, it was done and it

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all seemed so simple, with a huge concrete wall on one side, the Bhakra Lake on the other, turbines humming, canals running with water and pylons thrusting into the sky. The scene was transformed.

The same story repeated itself at the DVC, Hirakud, Nagarjunasagar, Tungabhadra, Chambal, Rihand, Sindri, the Chittaranjan loco works, mining sites, power stations; and then again at Bhilai, Rourkela, Durgapur and Ranchi. New names crept into the headlines—HAL, HMT, BHEL, ITI, ONGC, Neyveli—that I termed 'brand names of distinction'. Then IITs, IIMs, a string of research laboratories, shipyards, not to mention AMUL and the Kaira Milk Producers' Cooperative Union, pioneers of the White Revolution.

I recorded all of this from time to time and then in two great Bharat darshans, the first in 1959, covering over 8000 miles in 5 weeks, filing a story a day, all of which appeared on the front page of *The Times*. These were subsequently compiled as *A Journey Through India*. This was followed 5 years later, in 1964, by an even more extensive and ambitious journey, covering old ground to record progress and problems, and breaking much new ground, looking at the social infrastructure, agricultural advance and emerging urban patterns. This again was published serially in *The Times* and then compiled as a volume entitled *Design for Tomorrow*, with a foreword by the then deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, Asoka Mehta. My own preface concluded thus: 'The present stage of development unfolds a design for tomorrow. The way ahead will not be easy. But the prospect is hopeful.'

Among those who followed these series with close attention was Indira Gandhi, who, as information and broadcasting minister in Lal Bahadur Shastri's Cabinet, invited me to reorganise the government's information and publicity system and become its Principal Information Officer on special terms that the then finance minister, T.T. Krishnamachari, was prepared to consider, which in itself, she said, was a high compliment. I politely declined.

I am ahead of my story. The problem is that narratives must be told sequentially in order to make sense, even as events continue to occur episodically. These, however, though not unnoticed, must wait patiently to be recalled and noticed in a larger context.

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Two other major events followed, both of which called for detailed coverage. Pride of place must go to the first general election which, with succeeding elections, remains one of the great administrative and democratic wonders of the world, encompassing a magnitude and

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range that is quite unparalleled anywhere. The general election in 2009 had an electorate of around 715 million, or something more than the combined electorate of all of North America, Europe and Russia taken together. The 1952 election gave India its first parliament and one elected on adult franchise. The Congress won 364 seats to the Opposition's 135, of which the Communists formed the largest group with 31 members, apart from some others elected on Leftist tickets.

To understand the complexity of the election process, one should perhaps better begin with the census of 1951, the first in Independent India. Until 1941, deaths from hunger and malaria (along with other diseases) left united India with a large but largely stable population, growing incrementally. This was to change in the 1940s when medical advances began to get the better of the malarial vector and other killer diseases. Large tracts of land were reclaimed, the UP terai for example, and priority given to the Grow More Food campaign after the grim Bengal famine of 1943. In 1947, united India had an estimated population of 460 million of which approximately 336 million were left in India after Partition. The census of 1951 showed a sharp upturn in the population graph with the birth rate rising and death rate falling. An alarmed registrar general, R. Gopalaswami, warned of the perils of 'improvident maternity' and sounded a clarion call for birth control, a phrase quickly abandoned in favour of population or family planning.

India was the first country in the world that officially adopted family planning as a national goal. But little transpired on the ground. Under a Gandhian health minister, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the government preached abstinence and the 'rhythm method'. Neither worked. The manufacture and distribution of condoms followed, but marketing and social coyness remained problems, though the entire countryside was plastered with the 'red triangle' and the accompanying slogan, *'Do ya teen bas'* (Two or three are enough), to be followed by the more rational, *'Hum do, hamara do'* (We two, our two). The whole decade of the 1950s was lost. The pendulum then swung the other way. Sterilisation, especially tubectomy, became the order of the day, culminating in Sanjay Gandhi's ill-conceived, coercive sterilisation drive during the Emergency.

The other thing the census revealed was the heavy overhang of illiteracy especially among women, tribal isolation, poor connectivity and the burden of caste discrimination, bondage and other depressing social indices in what was still a traditional and feudal society.

It was to reach such an electorate that the first election commissioner, Sukumar Sen, had to plan. Nothing like this had ever been attempted

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anywhere. By a stroke of genius, it was decided to adopt everyday objects as election symbols for registered parties and independent candidates in order to overcome the illiteracy barrier. Electoral rolls had to be printed, constituencies delimited, reserved seats carved out and the necessary laws framed to put the Election Commission in place. Whole cadres of supervisors, polling and counting agents and political parties had to be trained, ballot papers printed in security presses, ballot boxes made, indelible ink (to mark the forefinger of those voting) manufactured, and so forth. The media was used to propagate the message. Drills were conducted and the terms of electoral broadcasts laid down.

Once the process of nominations and withdrawals was completed, the ballot papers, ballot boxes and related material had to be taken to each parliamentary and assembly constituency under tight security by road, rail, air, boat or foot. Elephants were used in dense forests and swamps, camels in the desert. The bandobust was on a truly heroic scale. The arrangements worked like clockwork and, subsequently, came to be adopted as a model throughout the Third World.

The campaign was conducted with great enthusiasm and anticipation. Posters and banners went up and vehicles were hired with loudspeakers to communicate with this vast, expectant electorate. The Congress was obviously the leading party with Nehru and many stalwarts of the freedom struggle in the field. Thereafter followed the Socialist Party under Asoka Mehta; the Communists, who had pockets of influence in widely scattered areas and were leading radical kisan movements; and the newly formed Jana Sangh under Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, backed by the RSS. The Jharkhand Party, then embracing a wide swathe of Middle India, also took the field under Jaipal Singh, a most affable and urbane Oxford-educated tribal leader, who had played hockey for India with Dhyan Chand in the Berlin Olympics of 1936.

I was assigned by *The Times* to cover the entire south (Madras Presidency, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Cochin), and parts of Orissa, and what was to become Madhya Pradesh. Other colleagues fanned out elsewhere. Spot stories of election speeches, atmosphere stories, backgrounders and interviews were filed. I followed Nehru through parts of Travancore and Hyderabad city and travelled with Asoka Mehta, covering much of the Socialist campaign in Telengana. In the Tamil districts of Madras, I followed the Commonweal and Toilers' Party (both OBC groups), and in the Telugu-speaking Circars saw the folk dance-drama form, *burra katha*, very effectively used by the Communists.

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The lure of the elections caused many to venture into the fray. New parties were established, some by the gentry out to protect their interests and to offer enlightened leadership to the illiterate masses! One such formation was the Praja Party that was founded by a group of plantation owners, bankers and other men of property in Travancore, which my father was somehow persuaded to join, by some friends. I dismissed the Praja Party as an inconsequential feudal force. This report was widely quoted and raised a laugh. Father took my words in good spirit and backed off from the new party, which soon disappeared without a trace.

The election campaign had all the colour and fascination of a national festival. Thousands lined dusty country tracks and city streets to catch a glimpse of Nehru and other heroes. Campaigning started early in the morning and went on late into the night. There was a certain decorum and little, if any, violence. Voting day was celebrated with a large turnout. Many voted, and still do so, only after having a bath. Village women wore their best and approached the polling booth in a worshipful mood. The ballot boxes were taken under escort to the district headquarters and counted manually. The process was slow. The results decisively returned the Congress to power at the Centre and in all the states, bar PEPSU, the Patiala and East Punjab States Union. All those who wondered how an illiterate country could venture on a democratic election on this scale were silenced. The outcome was an institutional triumph.

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The first two Lok Sabhas were preoccupied with translating the Fundamental Rights (the political and cultural charter) and the Directive Principles of State Policy (the economic and social charter) in the Constitution into substantive policies and programmes. The language policy was a particularly sensitive issue. With Partition, Urdu and even Hindustani had been sidelined. Article 343 stated that Hindi in the Devanagari script and the 'international form of Indian numerals' shall be the official language of the Union. However, English would continue to be officially used for the next fifteen years. Hindi zealots insisted on a pure, highly Sanskritised Hindi rather than the more popular bazaar Hindi or Hindustani, which borrowed from the various other languages of India. The southern states and Bengal were up in arms against what was described as 'Hindi imperialism'.

The Congress had, as far back as 1922, determined that the country should be administratively reorganised on a linguistic basis so that governance would be closer to the people. This was both laudable and

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desirable; but as Independence approached, fissiparous tendencies and tensions over identity and integration induced caution. The Congress leadership backtracked. The fast unto death by Potti Sriramulu, however, compelled the government to concede the separation of Andhra from Madras Presidency and to announce the formation of a States Reorganisation Commission (SRC), in 1953. The commission proposed linguistic states with exceptions in regard to Punjab and a composite Bombay Presidency. It also recommended that the integrity of the former Nizam's tri-lingual (Telugu, Kannada and Marathi) Hyderabad state (with Urdu as a fourth language) be maintained. Assam too was placed in a special category in view of the unique features of the North-east.

The arguments for not carving Maharashtra and Gujarat out of Bombay Presidency and for denying a Punjabi suba were untenable, and all three states were ultimately conceded after agitation and bloodshed. Hyderabad was divided into its linguistic components and merged with Andhra, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The reorganisation on linguistic lines, which created large new entities such as Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, changed the map of India. The debate on linguistic reorganisation raged furiously and all manner of parochial demands were advanced but sensibly rejected. Fortunately, it was guaranteed that where forty or more children wished to study in a mother tongue other than the state language, provision would be made to provide such instruction. This has ensured the survival of the languages used by smaller communities.

Nevertheless, in the interest of linguistic bonding, the SRC suggested the adoption of a three-language formula with the mother tongue, Hindi or another Indian language in the case of Hindi-speaking states, and English for schools. Unfortunately, the three-language policy was not honestly or imaginatively pursued, especially in the north.

Dr Keskar, the information and broadcasting minister, did not help matters by encouraging All-India Radio to propagate shuddh or pure, high-flown Hindi rather than a popular, pan-Indian Hindi of the kind cultivated by Bollywood and now increasingly evident in the evolution of Hinglish. No effort was made to produce inter-language dictionaries, a basic Hindi vocabulary for quick learning, a standard keyboard, translations, or skills and facilities for simultaneous interpretation. No incentives were offered for learning Hindi or a second Indian language. The record has been poor. The government did not fail; it simply did not try. This is most surprising considering the passion that language evokes.

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With the approach of the fifteen-year deadline after which Hindi was to become the (sole) official language of the Union, anxieties were increasingly expressed about the fate of English. Nehru wisely announced that it would remain an associate official language indefinitely, thereby relieving dangerous tensions and giving quietus to sentiments favouring Dravida separatism in Tamil Nadu. At the end of the day, however, India has largely weathered the linguistic crisis at the macro level, though it still has to contend with multiple mini crises of minority languages, dialects and scripts.

The plurality of culture fortunately found greater official and popular patronage in preserving and building upon the wonderful diversity of arts, crafts, music and dance and, especially, the varied handicrafts, handloom and other folk traditions. The Handicrafts Emporium, for example, was an early symbol of national cultural regeneration.

Other traditions were to prove more problematic. Ambedkar had sombrely warned that political independence and economic progress by themselves would not automatically resolve the many deep social contradictions confronting the nation. The codification and reform of complex Hindu family and property issues in a core Hindu Code Bill was championed by Nehru and Ambedkar, but ran into fierce opposition. The Congress, like the country, was bitterly divided between liberals and orthodox conservatives. A single major reform bill had to yield to component bills dealing with marriage and divorce, succession, guardianship and so forth. Ambedkar was greatly disappointed because he saw in this process not a mere tactical shift as argued by some, but a strategic retreat on the social front. The issue was hotly contested in Parliament and outside, and revealed the first signs of the consolidation of Hindu revivalism that was later to find expression in Hindutva in its varied manifestations.

Partition had, unfortunately, exacerbated the communal divide. Muslims were traumatised, felt orphaned, discriminated against and under siege and were therefore prone to cling to orthodoxy, Urdu and Aligarh University as symbols of identity and comfort. Another issue that brought the major communities into confrontation quite early on was the movement to prohibit cow slaughter. A member of an official committee on cattle preservation and development, Seth Govind Das, a senior Congress MP, reportedly observed that 'real Independence would be considered by the people as having been achieved only with the introduction of a complete ban on cow slaughter and the adoption of Hindi as the national language of the country'. A second expert committee reporting in 1955 opined that 'a total ban on slaughter of all cattle

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would not be in the best interests of the country' in view of the lack of feed.

Reporting on events, one saw the battle joined between Nehru, holding aloft the flag of secularism, plurality, tolerance and equity on the one hand, and the Jana Sangh under the banner of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the fading Hindu Mahasabha and Ram Rajya Parishad, and conservative elements from the Congress and society generally. That engagement continues.

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Meanwhile, economic issues kept pressing for attention. In a predominantly peasant society, land issues and agrarian conditions were understandably at the fore. No surprise then that land reforms had pride of place in Congress thinking. Peasants had been organised by the Communists in Madras, Bengal, what is now Kerala, and in Telengana, and they had embarked on an armed struggle for their rights. It is in this milieu that Vinoba Bhave saw in *bhoodan*—a voluntary land-gift movement—a Gandhian resolution of the land question. This served as a palliative but lacked the moral and social commitment to have anything more than a marginal impact.

The Mughal system of revenue administration was amended by the British, particularly under Lord Cornwallis who introduced permanent settlements over vast tracts, especially in eastern India. Under this dispensation, zamindars were named rent collectors in permanent settlement of large tracts of land. In return, they made fixed annual revenue payments to the (East India) Company.

The zamindars or feudal lords, thus bestowed with vast domains, found it convenient to lease large tracts to others, who in turn assigned further sub-leases to still others in a process that went down several rungs with the miserable cultivator—the actual tiller of the soil—at the bottom of the heap. Thus the rental exactions increased as one went down the ladder and the tiller was mulcted of the best part of his crop, and made to bear a large part or most of the risks of cultivation through pressure or subterfuge. Although zamindari was abolished through a series of provincial enactments in the 1950s, the state, which had promised a direct relationship with the actual tiller, had no way of knowing who the actual tiller was. In some states, landowners fudged their records and the state was embroiled in litigation and debate.

Meanwhile, at the end of much discussion, the zamindars were won over with a handsome payment of more than Rs 600 crores in compensation bonds. So, as I had occasion to write, 'Zamindari is dead.

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Long live the zamindars.' The subsequent story of agrarian reforms (land ceilings, sharecropping, minimum wages, fair rents, homestead plots, micro-credit, rural indebtedness) was faltering and desultory, marked by hollow rhetoric and lack of political will, evasion, mass evictions and much litigation. West Bengal and Kerala did relatively well (but were not as radical as J&K). The position in the ryotwari (peasant proprietor) areas was better, but the situation in the erstwhile princely states and in the 'permanently settled' areas such as Bihar and eastern UP was deplorable. A most powerful land-caste-feudal nexus had been forged.

All this was not merely socially unjust and potentially explosive but became what an acute observer, Daniel Thorner, described as a built-in agricultural depressor for which the nation had to pay a heavy price. I reported the debates on land reforms and the reports of expert committees and commissions, year after year, to no avail. Food zoning and a failure to develop superior seed strains and inputs or to offer incentive prices added to low agricultural growth and the beginning of a food dependency syndrome, nurtured through PL 480 imports from the United States. Despite the spread of irrigation, agricultural production could scarce keep pace with the increase in population, necessitating rationing and procurement. In Bihar, the Kosi and Gandak diversion projects failed to attain anything like their potential. My visits to those areas convinced me that agrarian reform was the key to liberating agriculture and society from the stranglehold of caste and feudal oppression.

Fortunately, new impulses were in evidence and with the assistance of the Ford Foundation, then a very active development partner, the beginnings of a new agricultural policy began to emerge with the focus on evolving a package of best practices and improved inputs, through an Intensive Agricultural Development Programme in selected districts. New seeds were being evolved by agronomists like M.S. Swaminathan. Verghese Kurien's buffalo-based cooperative milk revolution had also begun to take off in Anand and elsewhere in Gujarat. In Maharashtra, sugar cooperatives had initiated a new agro-industrial trajectory.

In 1957, with the second general elections, the Congress was again returned to power with a convincing majority. The party, however, suffered a setback in the newly-formed state of Kerala where, with the assistance of some independents it had supported, the CPI was able to form the first democratically-elected Communist government in the world.

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Meanwhile, the Second Five-Year Plan was announced. This had been drawn up under the influence of Professor Mahalanobis of the Indian Statistical Institute and carried a Marxist bias in keeping with the demands of socialist planning. The AICC too was soon to adopt a resolution at its Avadi Congress session to build 'a socialistic pattern of society'. The catch lay in the 'tic', which implied all things to all men, and was typical of the tendency to fudge issues.

The focus was now on industrialisation. Hence, the investment in three grassroots million-tonne steel plants at Rourkela, Durgapur and Bhilai with German, British and Soviet assistance, respectively. Also, a clutch of heavy machinery and mining plants at Ranchi, Durgapur and Vizag; new mining ventures, many of them tied to power stations like the Neyveli lignite plant; and the building of Bharat Heavy Electricals, Bharat Earth Movers, Bharat Electronics, the Cochin Shipyard, the Indian Petrochemical Industries, Baroda, the Diesel Loco plant at Benaras, and so forth. It was an ambitious undertaking by any standard and required training the requisite technical and skilled manpower. The IITs and IIMs were planned and more research laboratories were projected, denuding universities of their science research role and faculty, to their lasting detriment. Unfortunately, primary education and public health were relegated to the background, in a show of mistaken priorities.

The Second Five-Year Plan, however, ran into a serious resource crunch. The sterling balances India had accumulated in Britain during the World War, against supplies made and services rendered, were exhausted. Exports floundered in the context of a policy of import substitution designed to promote self-reliance or swadeshi, even as the demand for food imports kept rising in the face of a stagnant agriculture with an increasing number of mouths to feed. Foreign assistance from individual countries was gradually systematised under the World Bank which organised an aid-to-India consortium, which met annually to look at India's plans and requirements. This inevitably led to queries, monitoring, the evaluation of policies and programmes, and certain constraints.

The Soviets were forthcoming with assistance, especially in the areas of steel and heavy industries and, gradually, defence supplies like MIG fighters, tanks and submarines, with varying degrees of technology transfer and the development of indigenous manufacturing capability. With many critical industries reserved for the public sector, these avenues were largely barred to the private sector and foreign investment. Economies of scale could not be exploited as licensed capacities were limited to Plan requirements and production in excess of what had been

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sanctioned was considered a violation. This was inhibiting, and resulted in foreign exchange shortages that entailed a limitation on essential imports to sustain production.

Other bottlenecks in the way of industrial production and expansion were created by cumbersome processes for securing clearances from the Directorate General of Technical Development (DGTD).

Inter-union rivalries, with political parties forming their own unions, took political battles to the shop-floor. The public sector carried the further burden of civil service or secretariat control over managers and technocrats in the field. A number of civil servants were seconded to the public sectors and found themselves unable to stand up to their erstwhile superiors in the administration. As for technocrats, the jibe was that they were 'on tap but not on top'. Tensions developed. It took time for an industrial culture to permeate the regulatory system of the government.

The drive towards 'socialism' saw a creeping permit-licence raj with nationalisation of the Imperial Bank (which became the State Bank of India), and of the insurance companies to form the Life Insurance Corporation. In a bid to finance the ambitious Second Plan, a rigorous taxation policy was fashioned to soak the rich. An intermeshing system of taxation was introduced with penal rates on income, and taxation of wealth, gifts, capital gains. The business climate was affected. In an attempt to shore up a sagging stock market and bail out an over-stretched and possibly speculative investor, H.C. Mundhra, the finance ministry entered the market through the LIC to support some of his tottering investments.

Parliament got wind of this and the furore that ensued came to be known as the Mundhra scandal, involving the then finance minister, T.T. Krishnamachari; the finance secretary, H.M. Patel; the governor of the Reserve Bank, H.V.R. Iengar; the chairman of the State Bank, P.C. Bhattacharya; and others. Allegations were bandied about, and what had essentially been a concerted and well-intentioned, though somewhat informally constructed, market rescue operation came to be laced with insinuations of malfeasance, mistrust and corruption. These ultimately did not bear the test of close and impartial inquiry. The so-called Mundhra scandal rocked the nation. Unfortunately, a well-knit and highly regarded administrative team fell apart, and the close working relationship of mutual trust and confidence between a minister and his secretary and other senior aides unravelled and had to be redefined.

The country had, some years earlier, been troubled by the so-called

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Jeep scandal, involving Krishna Menon's emergency purchase of second-hand jeeps for the Army while he was the high commissioner in London, and an even more trivial Hindustan Housing 'scandal'. But as the years rolled on, the size and frequency of 'scandals' and corrupt practice grew exponentially to attain the grim proportions they have acquired today, aided by nepotism and the placement, in key positions, of persons who can be relied upon to respond when strings are pulled. The permit-licence raj spawned a tribe of seedy middlemen and musclemen who became intermediaries to those who sought wealth and power, and they finally began making the ugly transition from king-makers to king.

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If little has been said of other public figures or players it is because Nehru bestrode the scene like a colossus. Others were all too prone to defer to his views. Jagat Mehta, who worked with him in the formative years of the new Foreign Office before becoming foreign secretary himself, called it the Panditji-knows-best syndrome. S.K. Patil, among the most powerful Congress organisers and fund managers in his time, described Nehru as a banyan tree under whose sprawling shade nothing else would grow. Indeed, after Sardar Patel's passing, Nehru was increasingly unchallenged, though his admitted services, vision and liberal qualities undoubtedly endeared him to his countrymen.

This, however, was not without a price. Too much power was willingly concentrated in the person of the prime minister who was also foreign minister, chairman of the Planning Commission, the Congress supremo (often de facto, sometimes de jure), minister for atomic energy, chairman of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, minister for the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and much else besides. Nehru was a benign dictator by popular choice. Though he got many things right, he also got many things wrong and none dared or cared to say so, not even his biographers. So, 'After Nehru, who?' was the question that dogged the nation for years and was bandied around the world. This was an essentially irrelevant question that did little to build institutional confidence in India as a going democratic concern.

Coupled with Nehru's supremacy was the single party dominance of the Congress at the Centre and in all the states. This rare combination of circumstances stunted constitutional growth. Federalism was late to take root as all matters were decided in-house by the party. The Congress proposed and the Congress (read Nehru, during his lifetime) disposed of matters of state. Yet, if this seems 'exclusive', Nehru was

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'inclusive' as well, and his first and even second Cabinet consisted of 'outsiders', even rivals and technocrats like Ambedkar, Mookerjee, Shanmugham Chetty, John Mathai, Baldev Singh, C.H. Bhabha and C.D. Deskmukh.

Meetings of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the All-India Congress Committee (AICC), the full Congress sessions of all four-anna members (which was, originally, the Congress membership fee) and the Congress Parliamentary Party took place regularly. They were well attended and discussed all matters of importance before they were taken to the Cabinet, or brought before Parliament. The debates on Plans, policies and priorities were often stormy, and resulted in amendments and suitable adaptations to accommodate divergent views. This vigorous internal democracy lent strength and credibility to the Congress and made for participative party governance and a wider collective responsibility. The AICC and CWC were no mere rubber stamps. Unfortunately, this tradition steadily weakened and did not long survive Nehru and the early Indira Gandhi years. Even so, with the steady passing of the old guard, the edges had begun to fray and ritual gradually replaced debate, making the Congress leadership a somewhat authoritarian 'high command' in the militaristic terminology the party has, strangely, long employed.

By 1958-59, Nehru was in decline. He was tired and though still a charismatic figure, greatly beloved of the people, was increasingly unable to impart anything of the old dynamism to governance. The foreign exchange crisis, Plan difficulties, foreign policy setbacks and the sheer strain of trying to do everything had begun to take a toll. He was aware of this and, on more than one occasion within the span of four years, spoke of 'feeling stale' and of his desire to step down, if only for a while, so as to be able to think anew and recharge his batteries.

Sycophancy had, however, become the order of the day, and there was a chorus that the nation needed Nehru and he must remain at his post. I thought differently and wrote in *The Times* urging him to follow his instinct and retire, perhaps to become President of India, if he so desired. The reins of governance could then pass to younger and more dynamic hands within his own lifetime, so as to ensure a smooth political transition. This was very much a minority view but the murmuring about 'after Nehru, who?' was translating everywhere into the more worrying question, 'after Nehru, what?' Few feared disintegration, though some foreign observers did make dire forecasts.

Indeed, Nehru had first spoken of temporarily relinquishing office as prime minister, though not as Congress president, in 1954. He felt that

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the country had completed a first formative stage of transition and preparation after Independence and must now get ready for the 'next stage'—socialism, 'not in a dogmatic sense', but by moving from a 'mixed economy' to social ownership. He had returned from China greatly impressed by its national discipline and 'democratic centralism' (which, in reality, was more centralised than democratic, in the sense that debates were allowed but the decision-making process was still highly centralised). Nevertheless, he was convinced that the democratic path was best.

The idea of his retirement was scuttled by an outpouring of affectionate protest and expressions of confidence. I argued that should Nehru remain, the answer lay in his bringing in younger blood, revitalising the party and crying halt to 'the era of compromise'.

Four years later, with the passing of Maulana Azad, Nehru returned to the theme. He told the Congress Parliamentary Party that he wished to retire temporarily in order to seek 'a period of calm and quiet', to fit himself for the great tasks ahead. He was distressed by the deterioration in the Congress and public life, in general. There was 'too much jobbery'. He denounced the evils of careerism, casteism, communalism, revivalism and factionalism which 'scandalised and suffocated' him.

At the time, I had pointed out that all Nehru had inveighed against had troubled many intelligent and honest people both in the Congress and outside, as these evils had flourished 'not in the absence of Mr Nehru's leadership, but in spite of it ... Because there has been a compromise with principle right along the line and errant persons have not merely been tolerated but were entrenched in authority'. But then, Nehru went on to tone down his criticism of the Congress to great applause. The crisis was overcome; the inner rot continued.

Life went on as before. Indira Gandhi was made Congress president after the second general election and, soon thereafter, had to contend with something unprecedented, which caused widespread dismay and alarm—the formation of a Communist government in Kerala, under E.M.S. Namboodripad. In due course, the introduction of an Education Bill in Kerala to regulate textbooks and the appointment of school teachers caused alarm bells to ring.

V.R. Krishna Iyer (later to become a justice of the Supreme Court) was the education minister and the Education Bill became the focal point for the mobilisation of the Nair, Ezhava and Christian orthodoxy, and others, against the Marxists who were allegedly out to tamper with, if not destroy, faith and property rights. I was sent down to Kerala, as a prodigal 'son of the soil', to cover the mounting agitation. My reports

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were avidly read and I was locally feted as something of a special messenger to the political gods on high. Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, the home minister, asked to see me and questioned me closely on my appreciation of events in Kerala. I came to feel much later that I had probably gone overboard, swayed by exaggerated fears engendered by a mob mentality. But this realisation came too late. The Namboodripad ministry had been dismissed, with Indira Gandhi pressurising Nehru to act decisively, and the state was brought under President's Rule.

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I have thus far largely steered clear of foreign affairs, which was Nehru's own special preserve. Until Independence India's external relations and security concerns were handled by Whitehall with inputs from the viceroy, his political department and the commander in chief, whose theatre of operations virtually stretched from Aden to Burma and beyond, in both directions. India therefore came to Independence with no knowledge or deep background of foreign affairs or strategic affairs.

The Congress did not interest itself in foreign affairs at all and was content to leave this to Nehru. Foreign policy was shaped by Nehru who advocated not neutrality but non-alignment, which implied refraining from judging issues on the basis of preconceived ideology or alliances and looking at every issue on its merits. The world was soon caught up in the Cold War and became divided on the basis of ideology.

The non-aligned countries sought to serve as a buffer but many in the decolonising Third World soon got sucked into alliances. It was not long before Pakistan became what is today known as a 'frontline state', which is an ally, often offering bases, and one that can do no wrong in the eyes of those for whom it 'fronts'. India's great neighbour to the north, China, was taken over by the Communists under Mao. With that, India lost Tibet as a buffer and, following the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, found itself confronting a hostile China that had drawn close to Pakistan, even as India's own relations with the Soviet Union grew warmer. The United States and the West tended to see India as non-aligned in favour of the Soviet Union and felt that the non-aligned were, by and large, opposed to them. The non-aligned movement (NAM) did serve a useful purpose, but membership and attitudes were sometimes self-serving and its role exaggerated.

Foreign affairs loomed large in parliamentary debate (and to a lesser extent within the AICC) and it is in this forum that Nehru expounded his foreign policy, as though addressing a classroom. He would do the

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same at public meetings, making long, rambling, repetitive speeches that the press did much to edit and compress in the interest of comprehension. There would routinely be a foreign affairs debate in every session in both Houses. Nehru would open and reply to these debates, each speech lasting anything from an hour to ninety minutes, with members and packed galleries listening in rapt attention.

Relations with Pakistan dominated the discussions and foreign policy was essentially Kashmir-centric, with China coming to occupy centre-stage for a while. The perils of the Cold War was a recurrent theme and there were interludes devoted to apartheid, the non-aligned movement, Palestine, the Suez crisis, Hungary, Vietnam, nuclear disarmament, and so on. India had recognised Israel right at the start, but low-level diplomatic, essentially consular, relations were not upgraded to ambassadorial level until the 1990s, for fear of Arab resentment!

The country's Kashmir policy followed a tortuous course. The initial presentation of the Indian case in the UN was pedantic, whereas Pakistan's Zafrullah Khan was eloquently and emotionally expansive. He managed to get India's complaint of Pakistani aggression in J&K modified to a consideration of the wider 'India-Pakistan question' that brought in Partition, the communal divide, and a host of other irrelevancies like Junagadh and Hyderabad that obfuscated the issue. Krishna Menon's eight-hour verbal marathon in the Security Council was a disaster, as it bored everybody to sleep with few being the wiser for that punishment. India clearly had, and has, a strong legal and moral case in J&K but was pushed on the defensive following Sheikh Abdullah's arrest, and the rigged elections there until 1977 (that would, in any case, have been comfortably won). Most of all, being ranged on the wrong side in the Cold War, India's case never got a fair hearing from the Western powers. What mattered was neither principle nor right or wrong, but whose side you were on. Pakistan was a frontline state. Indian diplomacy failed to address this syndrome.

In 1959, General Ayub Khan, who had seized power in Pakistan, stopped over in Delhi en route from Karachi to Dacca (now Dhaka). He met Nehru and in the course of their conversation proposed that the two countries enter into 'joint defence'. By Nehru's own telling, he dismissed the remark, peremptorily exclaiming, 'Defence against whom?' This was a hasty and mistaken response. Was Ayub holding out an olive branch? Prudence required that the offer be cautiously welcomed as a basis for talks and further examination. The exercise might have come to nothing; but summary rejection stung Ayub and, four years later, Pakistan signed a Treaty of Friendship with China.

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Equally, Nehru was imperious in his attitude towards Nepal. On more than one occasion in Parliament he emphatically stated, in the context of India's security, that Nepal may be a sovereign state, but where India's security was concerned, its defence line stood along that country's Himalayan boundary, implying that Indian security interests could, if necessary, prevail over Nepal's sovereignty. He was equally scornful of the South-east Asian nations that had entered into what became the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), which later morphed into ASEAN.

Perhaps, more than any leader of his time, Nehru made diplomacy by state visits a staple of international diplomacy. Prior to that, world leaders largely only met at the UN or at specific conferences. Of course, the development of international civil aviation made this possible. Nehru was swept off his feet by the tremendous welcome he received on his state visit to the USSR in 1955, and was greatly impressed by its industrial prowess. This was to lay the basis for firm Indo-Soviet friendship, economic cooperation, rupee-rouble trade and the beginnings of technology transfer and military production and supplies. The return visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev in 1955, just after the famous 20th Congress when Khruschev critiqued Stalin, was another mammoth celebration. It was a time when Raj Kapoor's title song from *Awara* swept Russia, Africa and much of Asia.

Relations with Egypt and Yugoslavia blossomed in the warmth of the friendship between Nehru, Nasser and Tito. Nkrumah of Ghana, Sukarno of Indonesia and U Nu of Burma were other friends. But while personal relations flourished, state to state relations suffered a setback once some of these leaders stepped off the stage. Delhi kept physically growing through these years and its streets started taking on the names of Nasser, Tito, Makarios, San Martin, Benito Juarez and, later, Mandela. The only concession to the West was the commemoration of writers and scientists like Copernicus, Tolstoy and Max Mueller. Even Dupleix and Albuquerque disappeared as road names along with those of earlier British pro-consuls, together with their statues.

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India's dealings with China were viewed by Nehru as being of special bilateral and global importance. Once a Communist victory was assured and the People's Republic of China (PRC) was proclaimed in 1949, he became a staunch proponent of One China and was indefatigable in arguing that China's seat in the UN must be occupied by the PRC and not the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan. There was a warming of relations

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between Peking (now Beijing) and Delhi despite the PLA's march on Tibet and the extinction of Tibet's de facto autonomy.

Adopting a somewhat giveaway interpretation by K.M. Pannikar, the Indian ambassador in Peking, of China's notional suzerainty over Tibet being tantamount to sovereignty, India accepted Tibet as part of China in 1951, on the basis of the Sino-Tibetan 17-Point Agreement. This stipulated considerable internal autonomy for Tibet, especially with regard to its identity and culture, commitments that were not fully honoured subsequently when the Tibet Autonomous Region was unilaterally defined.

By championing China's rights and status, India had been of diplomatic assistance to China during the Korean War, and had taken an independent stance on the conflict in Vietnam, another sensitive issue for China. It was in this emerging climate of Hindi-Chini bhai bhai that India and China entered into the historic 1954 Sino-Indian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation governing relations between 'the Tibet region of China' and India. In compliance with the agreement, India unilaterally surrendered all its extra-territorial rights in Tibet.

At home and abroad, the Sino-Indian Treaty attracted little notice and some mild criticism for having seemingly achieved little. Most reporters and commentators missed the point. Writing for *The Times*, I dilated on the significance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence or Panch Sheel that had been enunciated. While the treaty referred to relations with Tibet, its real significance lay in the fact that while China was being threatened with fire and brimstone in the gathering Cold War, India and China, two of the largest countries in the world and potential Asian powers, had pledged to conduct their relations on the basis of certain universal principles that cut across alliances and Cold War logic.

Nehru did raise the question of Chinese maps that controverted the northern boundary claimed by India, but was fobbed off by Chou En-lai who said that those were 'old maps' that would be corrected 'when the time is ripe'. This was an ambiguous remark and subsequent map 'corrections' appropriated even more Indian territory. Nehru did not wish to embarrass or offend China, and he cited what he said were the wise remarks of a foreign diplomat who had told him that though a revolutionary power, China needed at least twenty to thirty years of peace for reconstruction and development before it would be ready to flex its muscles and get embroiled in any external adventures. It was, therefore, during those intervening quiescent years that the world should cultivate the People's Republic and win its friendship.

When within a few years, however, the Chinese dragon started

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breathing fire, the same wise foreign diplomat was reinterpreted by Nehru as having warned him that, under a revolutionary regime, China would act abnormally as an expansionist power for twenty or thirty years until the fanaticism engendered by the revolution was tempered by time. It would then begin to settle down as a mature power! He would also recall the mistake the West made in trying militarily to thwart the Bolshevik revolution, resulting in the Soviet Union developing a dangerous siege mentality, which made it mistrustful of everybody and everything. It was, therefore, important to befriend the new China and not isolate it and put it under siege. This was certainly an important insight, but to Chou En-lai, a proud and polished diplomat himself, Nehru's efforts to usher China into the Asian community at Bandung appeared somewhat presumptuous, as he was to relate to the Americans and others years later.

China's inability to match its promise of Tibetan autonomy with deeds had begun to create doubts in the young Dalai Lama's mind about his future relationship with Peking. Having come to India to participate in the 2500th anniversary celebrations marking the Enlightenment of the Buddha, he was somewhat disinclined to return to Lhasa. This would have been a great embarrassment to the Chinese. Chou En-lai, who was also visiting India at the time, expressed his concerns to Nehru who, in turn, took it upon himself to persuade the Dalai Lama to return home on the basis of what he thought were Chinese assurances that they would honour Tibetan autonomy. This, however, was not to be. The contours of the political reforms the Chinese announced soon thereafter, including the definition of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, caused resentment. This led to the Khampa revolt in eastern Tibet, a strong Chinese military reaction and the flight of His Holiness in 1959, to India, where he was given a joyous welcome. Peking angrily alleged Indian complicity, bringing the era of Hindi-Chini bhai bhai to a close.

*

This sudden turn of events, China's growing stridency and its now open and growing territorial claims on India caused bewilderment and concern in Delhi. The country suddenly learnt that China had annexed a large part of Ladakh in the Aksai Chin bulge through which it had constructed a strategic road linking Xinjiang to Western Tibet. The Indian response was astonishing, as revealed in the subsequent publication of notes on India-China relations in a series of White Papers. The government firmly asserted that the area in question was indisputably Indian territory,

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and then plaintively went on to complain that the Chinese had sent in construction teams to build the Aksai Chin road without duly applying for visas! *The Times* was thereafter the first to report further Chinese intrusions into Longju and Khinzemane in Arunachal and the ambush of an Indian patrol at the Kongka Pass in Ladakh.

All this while, India's defence posture had been geared to meeting possible threats from Pakistan. Krishna Menon, with his anti-Imperialist orientation, had become defence minister and was Nehru's principal foreign policy aide. There was little planning, procurement of weapons and equipment, or training for fighting on the Himalayan front. Indeed, Menon's relations with his top brass soon soured on account of his brash behaviour. This so dismayed the new Army Chief, General Thimayya, a very popular figure, that he sent in his resignation to Nehru, causing a national uproar. Nehru pulled up Thimayya and persuaded him to withdraw his resignation, but did nothing to rein in Krishna Menon. The result was a loss of morale and something of an embargo on reassessing threats and planning appropriate counter-measures.

Krishna Menon's brush with Thimayya also enabled him to plant in Nehru's mind the fear of Bonapartism within the military, a wholly mistaken notion that also entered other civilian minds. This is one reason that Nehru was hostile to the idea of appointing a Chief of Defence Staff, a sentiment that lingers in some civilian minds to this day.

*

Nehru had been invited to make a state visit to Bhutan and did so, late in 1958, on pony via the Chumbi valley, which the Chinese permitted. This was followed, in the spring of 1960, by an Indian parliamentary delegation to Bhutan and a ten-member international press delegation that same summer, of which I was a part. We inspected the first cut of the new Indian-aided road from Phuntsholing to Paro-Thimphu, and then continued on foot and mule through steamy jungles and then higher fern forests staving off persistent leeches with damp salt bags. The countryside was beautiful and the Bhutanese escorts genial. Riding mules was, however, exquisitely painful and, in the words of one of our colleagues, left a deep impression on our minds and bottoms. Most of us preferred to walk until some were able to transfer to yaks for a while in the higher reaches. The night halts under canvas were bliss.

The king had temporarily moved to Paro and it was, therefore, to Paro that we headed along the Paro Chu. A ceremonial welcome had

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been arranged for this international group of Indians, Brits and Americans. But just as we crossed the Paro bridge to the unexpected strains of a Bhutanese band playing 'Auld Lang Syne', the journalists jumped off and crouched for what were going to be historic photographs, leaving a string of mules to be received by the welcoming party led by the Paro Dzongpen or governor, traditional scarves in hand. Embarrassment turned to laughter as the press party re-mounted and the entry was repeated in style to great acclaim!

We had a wonderful week in Paro, where we were received by His Majesty, King Jigme Wangchuk, wise grandfather of the present monarch, the prime minister, Jigme Dorje and his gracious wife, Tess La. We were briefed on the country and its future by the king and feasted on some delicious roast suckling pig. There was a fete with an archery contest, dances and sporting events in which the king cheerfully participated and then gave away the prizes. The visit was truly memorable and we headed back to Delhi enveloped in the warmth of Bhutanese friendship.

*

Pondicherry had, some years earlier, been restored to India by the French, after negotiations. Salazar, however, held out and there was growing restiveness among Goan nationalists for union with India. With a rise in the tempo of the agitation, India decided to act. In December 1961, the 17th Indian Division under Major General K.P. Candeth marched into Goa and took over this Portuguese colony with barely a fight. A Portuguese warship, the *Albuquerque* was sunk, and the Portuguese forces surrendered. I was rushed to Goa but the action had ended and an Indian civil administration had been established under Candeth.

Indians delighted at this finale to India's freedom struggle, but international opinion was outraged over what was seen as aggression by a country that never tired of moralising about peace and non-violence. President Kennedy, who had befriended India, was saddened, and his emissary, James Schlesinger, the historian, who visited India, brushed aside every rationale and defence offered by Romesh Thapar (founder of the journal, *Seminar*, and one time confidant of Mrs Gandhi) and S. Gopal (director, historical division in the external affairs ministry) and me, at a private dinner. Nehru's international image was dented.

Whether encouraged by this 'victory' or otherwise, Krishna Menon with Nehru's approval and under a post-Thimayya military dispensation adopted a creeping-forward policy against China. There was a push to establish a string of posts (especially in Ladakh), which were intended to prevent further nibbling of Indian territory and, indeed, nominally

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recover lost ground. These were, unfortunately, weakly-held. An unprepared Army, lacking the necessary logistical support and other wherewithal, was unwisely committed to defend 'every inch of territory'.

A *Times* editorial on 15 August 1962, portrayed a mood of bewilderment:

> Anyone reading the latest White Paper on Sino-Indian relations together with some of the speeches by the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister on the subject might be forgiven for feeling that the Government's China policy, like chop suey, contains a bit of everything—firmness and conciliation, bravado and caution, sweet reasonableness and defiance ... We have been variously informed ... that the situation on the border is both serious and not so serious; that we have got the better of the Chinese and that they have got the better of us; that the Chinese are retreating and that they are advancing ...

Political bravado and infirm and somewhat divided military counsels were to cost the country dear. Lieutenant General Bijji (B.N.) Kaul, a political favourite, was given command of the newly formed 4th Corps, headquartered at Tezpur. Kaul may have been a good staff officer but had little operational experience, and was theatrical in his public relations forays at press briefings.

Earlier, reports of another Chinese nibble in the NEFA sector had fetched an incredibly casual 'throw them out' order by the prime minister, who then went abroad. Saner military objections were overruled and a brigade took up positions on the Namka Chu River below the Thagla ridge in the Tawang sector. The Chinese took this as a grave provocation and, after due preparation, launched a sharp offensive that scattered the Indian forces, and occupied Tawang. *The London Economist* said it all. In an editorial headed 'Plain Tales from the Hills', the journal scathingly commented: 'When the fog cleared, the Chinese were there.'

A new defence line was established at Se La, 16,000 feet south of Tawang. I was rushed to the NEFA front and joined a press party that was taken up to Dirang Dzong, in the valley beyond Se La, after a briefing by General Kaul. We were not greatly reassured seeing cheerful but ill-equipped jawans in cottons and canvas shoes manhandling 25-pounders into position up the cold heights. We had scarcely returned to base at Tezpur when word came on 18 November that the Chinese had enveloped Se La (which fell almost without a fight as a result of contradictory orders), and had broken through to Foothills along the Kameng axis.

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The deep anxiety that prevailed was not allayed by the fact that Bijji Kaul was somewhere 'out there' leaving his command virtually rudderless even as Major General Navin Rawley kept fighting a valiant action at Walong in the more easterly Luhit Valley.

From this point on, confusion reigned supreme. Somebody ordered the 4th Corps to pull back to Gauhati on 19 November, and as military convoys streamed west, somebody else ordered that Tezpur and the North Bank be evacuated and a scorched earth policy be executed and the Nunmati refinery be blown up. Rumour was rife.

The deputy commissioner, Tezpur, deserted his post in panic and the Assam government ordered Rana K.D.N. Singh, my contemporary at Doon and St Stephen's, to take charge of the tottering civil administration. The Joint Steamer Companies, manned mostly by the East Pakistan lascars, were tasked with ferrying the civil population to the South Bank. The exodus commenced by car, bus, cycle, cart and on foot. As the afternoon shadows lengthened, Rana had loudspeakers announce that he would board the last ferry for the South Bank at 6 p.m. and that it was the final chance for those still remaining to make the crossing. Those who could not make it melted away into the countryside and neighbouring tea gardens.

The Indian press had departed the previous day, anxious to seek safety rather than stay with the news. Tezpur was a ghost town. The State Bank had burnt its currency chest and charred notes wafted in the evening breeze. The administration had unlocked the gates of the mental hospital and some twenty to thirty bemused inmates could be seen wandering around the town like lost souls, poking at ebbing fires of incinerated 'papers' that had possibly contained fatuous 'state secrets', which the Chinese must at no cost read. Nehru broadcast to the nation, and more particularly to the 'people of Assam' to whom his 'heart went out' at this terrible hour of trial. He promised that the struggle would continue and that none should doubt the outcome. His words offered cold comfort and, to this day, angry North-easterners hold it against him and the Indian State that they had been bidden 'farewell'. The psychological defeat was greater than the military debacle.

As the moon rose, there remained in Tezpur no more than eleven journalists, only two of them Indian, Prem Prakash of Visnews, also covering for Reuters, and I. Our only companions were the hapless mental patients, some uneasy dogs that sensed something was wrong and a couple of alley cats. We wandered around town and the deserted waterfront, eyes and ears straining for any sound or motion. There was none; just a forbidding stillness until midnight when a transistor with

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one of our companions crackled to the Chinese announcement of a unilateral ceasefire from the midnight of 19-20 November (that night) and pull back to what had been the 'Line of Actual Control' before the October offensive, provided the Indian Army did not move in. Relief was mixed with lively speculation as to what would follow, as we repaired to the Planter's Club that had become our home, to dine off their plentiful larder of tuna fish, baked beans and beer and await the morrow.

AIR's early morning bulletin still had the Indian Army valiantly fighting the enemy, while all other stations around the world and the newspapers carried the Chinese ceasefire announcement and other details. None in Delhi had dared to wake up a tired prime minister and brief him about the night's dramatic developments. The imbecility and paralysis that had come to characterise Delhi and the pompous vacuity of the official information policy could not have been more strikingly demonstrated. For days and even weeks earlier, everybody from jawan to general, including Bijji Kaul, had been tuning in to Peking (now Beijing) Radio to find out what the hell was going on in their own battlefront!

The conduct of the India-China war was a total fiasco, a politically-dictated military disaster that befuddled commanders did not firmly resist. President Radhakrishnan spoke for the nation when he indicted the government for 'credulity and negligence'. Nehru himself conceded, 'We were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and were living in an artificial atmosphere of our own creation. We have been shocked out of it . . .' Yet he was reluctant to be rid of Krishna Menon, who was relieved of the defence portfolio only under mounting political pressure, and it was much later that he submitted his resignation as minister without portfolio.

Nehru was a broken man and abject in his pleas for US military assistance. He wrote to Kennedy after the fall of Bomdila pleading that unless something was done immediately to stem the tide, all of Assam, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland would pass into Chinese hands. Years later, I was to learn that he spoke of Chinese forces massing in the Chumbi Valley and feared another 'invasion' from that direction. If Chushul was overrun in Ladakh, there was nothing to stop the Chinese before Leh. He said the IAF had not been used as India lacked air defence. He therefore requested immediate air support by twelve squadrons of supersonic all-weather fighters with radar cover, all operated by US personnel. But US aircraft were not to cross the Indian border and intrude into Chinese air space.

The panic and despair were palpable and Nehru's non-alignment lay

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in shambles. Kennedy was comforting, but found Nehru embarrassingly silent and withdrawn when they did meet later, as did John Kenneth Galbraith, the US ambassador, who had strongly advocated assisting India in every way.

International opinion was sympathetic, though some snidely remarked that Nehru had got his comeuppance. China had offered 'unconditional' negotiations even as it nibbled and occupied Indian territory. At one point Chou En-lai offered to recognise Indian claims in the North-east if India accepted Chinese claims in Ladakh. This was turned down. Soon afterwards, world opinion was diverted by the Cuban missile crisis that threatened a nuclear confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. In the event, the Soviets blinked, and if the Chinese announced their unilateral ceasefire along India's northern border, it was probably because the US and the Soviet Union were now more likely to intervene in India's favour. Some in India believed that had the Indian Air Force been used, the Chinese could have found themselves in difficult straits operating from rarefied Tibetan bases that implied reduced aircraft capability. But the use of air power had been studiously rejected as a policy for fear of escalation.

Tezpur limped back to normal by 21 November. Lal Bahadur Shastri, the home minister, paid a flying visit, followed by Indira Gandhi a day or two later. I remained in Tezpur for the ensuing weeks at the deserted Planter's Club and returned to Bomdila, the Kameng district headquarters, around Christmas with Major K.C. Johorey, the political officer. The local population had stood solidly with India and welcomed the administration back. Parliament bayed for blood. A military inquiry into the NEFA debacle was ordered by the new Army Chief, General J.N. Chaudhuri. The Henderson Brooks Report that resulted remains classified to this day.

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One of the consequences of the 1962 war was the blossoming of Sino-Pakistan friendship, partly aimed at containing India. By a treaty signed in 1963, Pakistan ceded 5000 square km of J&K's Shaksgam Valley to China. Another was mounting disillusionment in East Pakistan over its defencelessness and marginalisation and neglect by the dominant West Pakistan clique.

Humiliation in battle had aggravated the growing crisis in governance. Nehru's leadership had begun to pall and the rot had spread to the Congress, which had lost something of its earlier idealism and élan. Everybody wanted to enter the legislature and jockey for ministerial

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positions. Indeed, it was a routine ploy for us at *The Times* to ring up party contacts and drop a hint about rumours of a possible Cabinet reshuffle to get the man salivating and ready to share insider knowledge about political goings-on.

Attempts had been made to introduce a ten-year rule for holding office, to make room for young blood, to no avail. But in the sombre mood induced by the 1962 debacle, the so-called Kamaraj Plan was eagerly bought by Nehru. Kamaraj, the successful chief minister of Madras, proposed a swap between senior members of the government and the party organisation in order to invigorate both. Many ministers submitted their resignations to Nehru, and of those, six chief ministers and six Union ministers were asked to step down—Kamaraj himself, Morarji Desai, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Jagjivan Ram among them. Kamaraj became the Congress president, Nehru stayed on as prime minister. Little changed. At least not in the matter of rejuvenating the party.

Several problems began to gain momentum, and an ailing Nehru found that he had to contend with looming language troubles in the south. Annadurai, the DMK leader, had given utterance to the idea of a separate Dravidanad in the Rajya Sabha in 1962, reflecting the sense of uncertainty and resentment in large areas of the south regarding the pace of change to Hindi. The matter was resolved in 1965 after the language riots in Tamil Nadu when bilingualism (with Hindi and English) was accepted as national policy.

Meanwhile, relatively unnoticed, other events had taken place. In pursuance of a national report on democratic decentralisation to aid grassroots planning and governance, prompted by the indefatigable S.K. Dey, legislation was passed to adopt a three-tiered panchayti raj. Rajasthan was the first to introduce the new system, and some like Maharashtra and Gujarat also made good headway. MLAs and bureaucrats, however, felt that their patronage and authority were being undermined and joined hands to delay or scuttle the process. It was not long before panchayati raj was reduced to a slogan, and the country had to wait almost three decades for Rajiv Gandhi to bring it back.

*

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the J&K chief minister, had been removed under the Kamaraj Plan, paving the way for the release from detention of Sheikh Abdullah who had mellowed. Nehru had been unhappy at the turn of events in Kashmir and was anxious for reconciliation.

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Autonomy had been whittled down through a series of presidential orders and the Union's jurisdiction extended to the state under several heads, not all of them objectionable by any means but, nonetheless, resented for the manner of their imposition. The designation of the Sadr-i-Riyasat was amended to governor, now a presidential appointee rather than one elected by the state legislature, and that of the Wazir-e-Azam to chief minister, cosmetic changes that achieved little but caused avoidable emotional hurt.

The state Constitution had been adopted in 1957, and with Pakistan now firmly a US military ally the UN resolutions charting a road map of ceasefire, truce and a plebiscite had become effete. The UN representative, Gunnar Jarring, said so in clear terms. Pakistan had, with Anglo-US connivance, blatantly violated the crucial truce terms that called for its total withdrawal from the state and the disbanding of its 'Azad Kashmir' forces and administration, and had therefore no grounds for insisting on a plebiscite. Britain, and more especially the US, had by now become part of the problem in J&K, so flagrant was their bias. This finally showed up in the infamous Nixon 'tilt', in 1975, when Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, as recorded in his personal diaries, instigated the Chinese to wage war against India to stop the disintegration of Pakistan, on the assurance that the Americans would act if the Soviet Union intervened!

A tired and harried Nehru, in the evening of his life, kept reminding himself of things undone. A volume of Robert Frost's poems lay by his bedside opened at the lines:

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep.

Among other things, he was deeply concerned about finding a way out of the impasse in J&K. After Abdullah's release, he invited the Sheikh to be his guest in Delhi and after prolonged conversations encouraged him to visit Pakistan and Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK) to talk things over, carrying an embryonic concept of a united J&K confederation through 'constitutional adjustments'. Ayub was cold to the idea but Abdullah went on to Muzaffarabad for talks with the PAK leader, Abdul Qayyum Khan. While there, he received news of Nehru's passing and returned post haste to a grief-stricken India.

I was much taken with the idea and had, in several conversations with the Sheikh during the lonely years when he was persona non grata,

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heard him refer to a 'soft frontier' (along the CFL) in J&K, which would ease tensions, promote trade and understanding and, possibly, lay the basis for a lasting Indo-Pakistan settlement.*

*

Nehru had laid the foundations of a liberal, democratic and plural society and a mixed economy that had given India a place in the world though some felt it was inclined to punch above its weight. He developed a Nehruvian consensus that defined the broad contours of domestic and foreign policy that outlived him. He fell short in many matters and, though a historian, lacked a strategic vision. Nonetheless, he was readily forgiven in the balance for the values he espoused and his many undoubted accomplishments. He should have responded to his own intuition and retired as prime minister around 1958, and served the Congress and the country in other ways. But surrounded as he was by all too many sycophants, he gave in easily and stayed on.

Kashmir remained a problem, but the Indus Treaty had been signed and was working well. There was a sense of national pride in the progress that the country was making, as Nehru's dedication to the development of science and technology and a scientific temper began to bear fruit. The Atomic Energy Commission under Homi Bhabha enjoyed a rare autonomy from bureaucracy and red tape matched only by Kurien's National Dairy Development Board and, later, the Indian Space Research Organisation under Vikram Sarabhai. Bhabha had, even prior to Independence, forecast the role of nuclear energy in future development. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, under Professor M.G.K. Menon, had developed a pilot computer in 1956, and four years later built a medium-sized digital computer, TIFRAC, which catered to a variety of national computational demands.

Yet there were areas where much needed to be done. And Nehru never tired of reminding people that the current generation would have to tighten its belt so that the next generation might rise above poverty. That day is yet to come. He was a poor judge of character.

The AICC meeting in Bhubaneshwar in January 1964 was Nehru's last major engagement. He suffered a stroke and never really recovered,

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*I wrote about this idea in a series of articles in *The Times*, based on my visit to Pakistan in October 1964, and continued to advocate it thereafter as a sensible and practical way forward to South Asian rapprochement and harmony. They were published in a book, *Our Neighbour, Pakistan* (Bombay: Yusuf Meherally Centre, 1965).

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passing away on 27 May. The nation mourned the loss of a beloved son. Delhi and Allahabad were a sea of sorrowing humanity as the last rites were performed and Nehru's ashes consigned to the elements, in accordance with his will and testament, a poetic document with more than a trace of ego. An era was over and I had been privileged to witness it unfold and record some of it in what newspapermen like to call the first draft of history.

*

The question, 'After Nehru, who?' was quickly answered. When the time came, Lal Bahadur Shastri, who had been marked out by Nehru, was called upon to take the reins of office, to Morarji Desai's chagrin. Kamaraj and the so-called Syndicate of Congress oligarchs brought about a 'consensus'. Shastri took over and brought a quiet pragmatism to bear on governance.

Those were anxious times. The economy was troubled and there was pressure on the government to adopt a more imaginative agricultural policy with reliance on better seeds, fertilisers and minimum support prices to feed its 470 million people. The balance of payments was worrying and rumours of devaluation were scotched, though this had been the topic of quiet negotiations with the World Bank and the aid-India consortium led by the Americans.

Meanwhile, J&K was on a slow boil. Pakistan, fuelled with the unrestrained rhetoric of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a rising star, felt that a combination of what it thought was a weakened India after Nehru, a humiliated military after 1962, Chinese support and American military aid offered it a unique opportunity to settle scores with its neighbour. I had visited Pakistan in the autumn of 1964, just preceding Pakistan's 'basic democracy' elections to local bodies and a presidential poll in which Fatima Jinnah was opposing Ayub. The elections were rigged and Ayub won. I was granted an interview with him and he spoke of the need for an Indo-Pakistan settlement, though Bhutto, then the fuel and mines minister, was belligerent.

There was a steady rise in border violations across the ceasefire line in J&K and then, suddenly, a diversionary attack in Kutch that was only partly repelled and resulted in an international dispute that was referred to the International Court of Justice, for arbitration. Then followed an incident relating to the temporary disappearance of the holy relic from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar, an event that aroused much passion and anxiety in the Valley.

Pakistan continued to foment trouble and went on to launch Operation

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Gibraltar under Major General Akhtar Hussain Malik, in August 1965, infiltrating eight columns comprising about 5000 troops and trained mujahideen across the CFL in a bid to stir a local uprising, cut the Valley off from Jammu and capture Srinagar. There was no uprising. Instead, local shepherds reported the presence of dubious strangers. The raiders were engaged and scattered, and their bases across the CFL in the Kargil sector and elsewhere captured. Nevertheless, India withdrew from these staging posts on UN assurances and after the UN Military Observer Group under General Nimmo, an Australian, had clearly documented Pakistan's transgressions, sector by sector. The Nimmo Report was never discussed and the Security Council called for pull backs and negotiations, once again treating the aggressor on par with the victim.

Stung by its reverses, Pakistan launched a major offensive across the international border in the Chhamb sector, in a bid to capture the Akhnoor bridge on the Chenab and sever the line of communication to Jammu. Shastri had declared that an attack on J&K would be an attack on India and ordered an Indian Army offensive in the Lahore sector. There were fierce engagements and though the Icchogil Canal was crossed, the bridgehead could not be held. However, the Pakistani Pattons took a beating at Asal Uttar near Khem Karan and in the Samba-Sialkot sector while the IAF Gnats were more than a match for the Pakistani Sabre jets. The eastern sector was quiet as India had no reason to ruffle incipient Bangla nationalism, though the Chinese did huff and puff in Sikkim as a diversion, but to little effect.

I was sent to take stock of the situation and traversed the J&K, Punjab and Rajasthan fronts talking to generals and jawans as well as to the locals. The Army Chief, General Chaudhuri, also gave me a briefing. India did not win a famous victory but Pakistan had been stopped in its tracks.* There were rumblings in Pakistan and the misadventure saw the beginning of the end of Ayub.

The 'Sixteen-Day War' (a label that discounted Pakistan's nefarious Operation Gibraltar) had concluded in yet another ceasefire. UN

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*I recorded these impressions in a series of articles, which were later published as a booklet, 'India Answers Pakistan' (Bombay, *The Times of India*, 1995). General Chaudhuri ordered 100,000 copies for distribution to the Army but his Northern Army commander, Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh, was later to say that some gullible journalists had been taken for a ride. But for his intervention at Khem Karan, Pakistani armour would have been on the road to Delhi.

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intervention having failed to yield results, the Soviets offered their good offices and Shastri and Ayub went to Tashkent to meet Kosygin and Brezhnev. An agreement was reached in January 1966, whereby both sides gave up the gains they had made across the CFL. Thus India returned the Black Peak opposite Kargil and the Haji Pir bulge in Poonch, both strategic salients that Pakistan was to use to advantage later. Indira Gandhi, then information and broadcasting minister, had called me the evening the Tashkent Agreement was sealed and had expressed disquiet about the return of Haji Pir, in particular. 'The Army won't like it,' she said. That same night came news that Shastri had died of a massive heart attack. His body was flown back from Tashkent for a state funeral in Delhi that the Soviet leaders and Ayub attended. A great little man had gone. His slogan, 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan!' lived on.

*

It was from Bombay that I had been assigned to cover the 1962 and 1965 wars. There were other forays too at home and abroad. I journeyed to Moscow without a visa that was promised but did not arrive. This found me quarantined in Ostankino on the city's outskirts until rescued by India's ambassador, K.P.S. Menon, and the visiting industries minister, Morarji Desai. That was quite an experience, with Aeroflot women siding with me against Soviet Immigration. I had come in from Berlin, still divided by the Wall, and Warsaw where I was deeply moved by the lovingly reconstructed Old Warsaw, a heritage quarter, and even more so by a visit to Auschwitz on a beautiful sunny afternoon that belied the horror of the concentration camp with its gas chambers. In contrast, I had that very morning visited the cathedral in Cracow where the organist played Bach's 'Tocata' and 'Fugue'. The morning sun had streamed through the stained glass windows to light the magnificent Wit Stwosz altar piece with its delicately carved wooden sculptures. That had been a benediction . . .

I had been posted back to Bombay from Delhi in 1962 as an assistant editor or leader writer. I was reluctant to leave Delhi. Being chief of *The Times* bureau with wide latitude to write and travel had been an ideal posting. Yet, after twelve years (serving first under Subbaroyan and then Mulgaonkar before taking over as chief), it was time for change. Morarji Desai was put on the job of persuading me by *The Times* management. He said that I would be succeeded in Delhi by G.K. Reddy, a 'Communist'. He was the wrong man for his current sensitive posting in London and would be better off in India under more watchful eyes! It

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was an astonishing argument that made no impression on me. Nevertheless, we said our farewells from our flat on Pandara Road.

I had left Bombay as a bachelor and now returned to that metropolis with a family. Vijay Khurram and Rahul Salim had been born.

I was also soon to become an author with *Himalayan Endeavour* that told the story of Indian mountaineering and Himalayana. I had also heard about the Abominable Snow Man, a mysterious creature that inhabited the icy wastes on high, unsighted but for 'its' giant footprints in the snow. I was soon to make close or, perhaps, better acquaintance with its more famous cousin, The Abominable No-Man, within the corridors of power in Delhi.

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ENTER MRS G: 'MADAM PRIME MINISTER, SIR'

Many believe that Indira Gandhi was willed to office by her father, whose chatelaine she had been at Teen Murti House for many years. She had travelled around the country and the world with him, met the great and mighty, and had acquired a degree of experience and exposure to public affairs that was possibly unrivalled in the country. Her induction into the Congress Working Committee (CWC) and subsequent elevation as Congress president in his lifetime suggested that Nehru was intent on grooming her as his successor. Witness to the somewhat parochial and culturally insular orientation of some of his colleagues, he may not have been far wrong in believing that his daughter, more than anyone else, shared the liberal, secular, pan-Indian outlook that was needed to hold the country together during the formative period of nation-building.

There were, however, others—older, ambitious, with more political savvy and administrative experience—waiting in the wings. But after Nehru's death, it was Lal Bahadur Shastri who went on to assume charge as prime minister. Indira Gandhi was offered a portfolio of choice in the Cabinet to ensure sufficient ballast, but declined in grief and wished to be with her sons abroad, at least for a while. Shastri approached her as soon as she returned and she was sworn in as minister for information and broadcasting.

She was not happy with the ministry's role and structure, and set up a committee under A.K. Chanda to review the various departments

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under her charge—All India Radio (AIR), the Department of Audio-Visual Publicity (DAVP), the Films Division, the Office of the Press Registrar and the Press Information Bureau (PIB)—with a view to revamping them and allowing them a greater measure of autonomy. Corporatising AIR and permitting commercial broadcasting to facilitate greater autonomy and supplementary funding were among the committee's recommendations.

*

When Shastri died suddenly in Tashkent in 1966, Morarji angled for the prime minister's post, but the Syndicate again thwarted him, putting its weight behind Indira Gandhi, for some believed that they would be able to manipulate her like a puppet.

Gulzarilal Nanda once again became acting prime minister, as in 1964. Subsequently, Indira Gandhi was chosen by the Congress as prime minister elect. I had just returned from an assignment in Italy, and was on my way to Bombay via Delhi. As I prepared to board my flight at Palam, I received a call from Dinesh Singh, a Doon contemporary, who said that he wanted to meet me urgently. As S. Gopal (Director, Historical Division, External Affairs Ministry) had called earlier, addressing me as 'Mr Press Secretary', I had a hunch what Dinesh's business might be. Next morning, I received a call from Asoka Mehta asking me to return to Delhi as the PM wanted to see me. I thought I should consult the editor, Nanporia, but Asoka cut me short with, 'The prime minister is now your boss.'

Nanporia approved, and so I took the evening flight and drove straight to meet Asoka Mehta, then planning minister. He said the PM wanted me as her press secretary and that I must accept. He arranged for me to meet C. Subramaniam, the food and agriculture minister, who was more explicit and talked about the formation of an informal policy planning group, a brains trust with new blood to promote new ideas. This seemed an invitation to a brave new world with, maybe, Indira Gandhi as the first of a new generation of leaders rather than the last of the old.

I met Mrs G at the South Block the next morning and said I'd spoken to Dinesh, Asoka and Subramaniam. 'So you have been suitably persuaded,' she remarked. As to job content, she was vague and spoke about influencing information policy in a positive direction. I said I must have full access to information, and that I would need to avoid crossing lines with the established information agencies in the government. She agreed. And that was that.

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I told Dinesh that I had neither the inclination nor the talent to be a public relations manager or image builder, but could help with ideas and sell policy, acting independently of the hierarchy. L.K. Jha, secretary to the PM, welcomed me, discussed terms and more or less said that it would be for me to shape the job. I was designated Information Adviser to the PM.

Back in Bombay, Jamila and my colleagues at *The Times* were delighted. *The Times* ran the news the following day and I was touched when Frank Moraes, now at *The Sunday Standard*, wrote saying that the appointment had 'warmed the cockles of his ageing heart'.

I left for Delhi on 23 February, ending seventeen eventful and happy years at *The Times of India*, leaving Jamila to follow in July, after an extended European and West Asian concert tour with the Paranjoti Chorus, while the boys holidayed in Tiruvalla. Jamila enjoyed music and sang with church choirs. Membership of Bombay's well-known Paranjoti Chorus, conducted by Victor Paranjoti, formerly of AIR, was for her both a privilege and pleasure.

I joined the government on 25 February 1966 with no sense of being a civil servant and did, indeed, manage throughout to remain largely outside the system in attitude, work style and relationships. The prime minister treated me with friendly informality, and I was able to speak to her and send her notes in a style and with a content far removed from protocol and the prevalent file-and-babu culture.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) itself was a fledgling institution, having been first established by Lal Bahadur Shastri. The PM's Secretariat was expanded under Indira Gandhi with, first, L.K. Jha and a year later, P.N. Haksar, as secretary. Sushital Bannerjee, a fine officer who sadly died young, soon joined as joint secretary. V.B. Eswaran, Natwar Singh and Moni Malhoutra were the other officials. (Nehru had not maintained a PMO. He had an ICS private secretary and operated from the external affairs ministry, which he headed, and leant on its secretary general, Girja Shankar Bajpai and, subsequently, Raghavan Pillai, as well as the Cabinet Secretary. At the PM's residence at Teen Murti House, M.O. Mathai, Nehru's personal private secretary from the Congress days, acquired a measure of influence by regulating his visitors. He gave himself airs and later wrote a somewhat embittered and exaggerated account of his tenure, a product of frustrated ambition.)

N. Seshan was Mrs G's private secretary, an efficient, self-effacing and loyal official who often acted as a buffer when the PM's wrath was aroused. Altogether, the PMO remained a modest establishment, with an extramural Kitchen Cabinet. Its real expansion followed well after

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my time when it morphed into a mini-government within the government.

I was allotted a room in the Prime Minister's Secretariat in the South Block, and was immediately initiated into the mysteries of government's Warrant of Precedence by my trusty PA and squire, Ahluwalia, who took me firmly in hand. There was no air-conditioner in the room as the previous incumbent was a mere deputy secretary who 'as per rules' was not entitled to feel overly hot. The official theory was that the blood grew thinner with ascending seniority, entitling the officer to one, two or more air-conditioners. The same theory worked for arm rests, back rests and foot rests, durries vs carpets, cupboards, bookcases, doormats, hat racks, et al. Protocol also dictated the amount of red and gold your peon or chaprasi might wear, that is, if you had a chaprasi at all. Mine had a lot of red but not quite so much gold. I, however, managed to keep a stiff upper lip.

Ahluwalia insisted I was ripe for an air-conditioner but I, instead, indiscreetly asked for a typewriter to speed up work and obviate dictation. This unprecedented request caused consternation in South Block. Such a revolutionary demand had not been heard since Oliver Twist! Anyway, a typewriter was duly installed. Nor did I allow my chaprasi to hover around the car park in the morning, to relieve me of my briefcase the moment I arrived. It would seem that official research had established that senior officers carry so much responsibility that the weight of a briefcase could do incalculable damage to their spine. It was amazing how little I knew about the complex medical and neurological elements of higher governance, on which the nation's fate and fortune depended.

The first thing Ahluwalia did on my being seated in my chair, hands on arm rest, was gravely to present me with a key, which I was on no account to leave unattended. I was soon to discover why. Minutes later my chaprasi marched in solemnly, a black steel strongbox in hand. He turned a key in its lock following which Ahluwalia instructed me to take out my key, the one he had just given me, and give the lock another turn. I did so, and on opening the dispatch box discovered some mouldering sheets of paper inside. I took them out reverentially and saw that they were marked 'secret'. They were from the External Publicity Division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and summarised foreign press reports, many of which had been translated into English and were quite some weeks old, doubtless indicative of the considerable labour involved. What first caught my wary eye was the bold injunction, 'Burn after reading'. This was underlined.

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I was ready to do my duty. Without losing a moment, I asked Ahluwalia for a matchbox only to be advised that that would not be necessary. Was it that the government did not burn paper on Tuesdays? Thereupon, I wrote 'Seen' on the margin of the top sheet and signed it gravely as 'IA to PM'. This done, the papers were placed back in the box. I turned my key. The chaprasi, summoned by an impatient buzzer, re-entered the chamber and turned his key to double-lock the strongbox. Thus secured, the box was ceremonially carried out of the room while Ahluwalia and I stood prayerfully, with bowed heads. The drill had been perfectly executed but I was not without qualms of conscience. Should not I have burnt the papers? Had I defaulted and violated a sacred duty? What would happen if the 'enemy' were to get hold of those secret documents, and discovered dark meaning in those otherwise plain but, surely, coded words? Ahluwalia, greatly experienced in such matters, gave me a reassuring smile and I, regaining my composure, leant back in my chair, legs resting on the footstool, to await the next stern summons to duty.

It was time to meet L.K. Jha. When I returned, Ahluwalia said 'They' had called. I took no notice, whereupon Ahluwalia repeated rather more severely that 'They' had called. 'Had they?' I said, in a tone that suggested that 'They' could wait. Ahluwalia turned pale. Who called, I finally inquired. 'Your lady wife from Bombay,' he replied. After that Ahluwalia and I got on famously and I found him a sterling fellow. For in government, many an official is no better than his PA. Thus ended my first day in government. I had been broken in and had experienced the reverence for useless paper.

Apart from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the South Block, my other 'office' or port of call was the Prime Minister's House (PMH) at No. 1 Safdarjang Road. Nehru had shifted from No. 1 York Road (now Motilal Nehru Marg) to Teen Murti House, the former residence of the commanders in chief, of whom Claude Auchinleck was the last. On Nehru's death, the house was converted into a Nehru Memorial and Library though an urn containing some of his ashes was buried in Shanti Van, north of Rajghat (the Gandhi Memorial), converting the stretch up to Salimgarh and the old Jamuna bridge into some kind of national Valhalla.

Lal Bahadur Shastri had, accordingly, moved to No. 10 Janpath as prime minister. On his demise, part of this mansion had been converted into a memorial while his family stayed on in the other part of the residence. Hence Mrs G, on becoming the prime minister, remained at No. 1 Safdarjang Road, which she had been allotted as information and

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broadcasting minister. This was obviously far too small to be the three-in-one PMH, combining as it did an office-in-residence, the family quarters and public reception rooms. Security was very easygoing in those days, and visitors would stream into the PMH unannounced and walk into the office seeking appointments or darshan. There was no privacy and the PM would receive important visitors in the dining room or even in her bedroom. There were occasions when I espied hard-pressed ministers virtually tumbling out of cupboards. It was an absurd situation that called for immediate correction.

Some favoured Mrs G returning to Teen Murti House, which could be converted into a permanent PMH. One or two rooms in this vast building could be preserved with Nehruvian memorabilia. The rest could well be shifted to a newly-built and specially designed Nehru Memorial and Library at Shanti Van. Mrs G demurred. Teen Murti House was not built 'for Indian living', she argued. Padmaja Naidu, a close confidante, also did not favour the idea.

So the search commenced for another gracious mansion. The criteria laid down were sufficient accommodation, spacious grounds, a convenient location and a place that could be adequately secured. Finally, it was decided to build a new PMH in part of the Rashtrapati Bhavan Estate at an approximate cost of thirty lakh rupees. By the time the debate concluded, firmer estimates placed the cost at around fifty lakhs. Morarji Desai had, by then, become finance minister, and the proposal was shot down as an extravagance in the time of a food and financial drought.

Thus No. 1 Safdarjang Road remained the PMH, but the congestion was, in time, relieved by acquiring the adjacent property. The roundabout in front of the main entrance was landscaped and came to be known as Gol Methi Chowk. This acquired fame, or notoriety, in 1975, as the venue of rent-a-crowd mobs that bayed for the Emergency. On Mrs G's tragic assassination in 1984, the building was converted into an Indira Gandhi Memorial. No. 7 Race Course Road and the adjacent bungalows were occupied by Rajiv Gandhi thereafter, and by those who followed—V.P. Singh, Deve Gowda, Inder Gujral, Narasimha Rao, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Dr Manmohan Singh—thus becoming the official residence of the prime minister.

A question that had to be settled early on was how the PM should be addressed. After some deliberation, Mrs G said 'Madam' or 'Madam Prime Minister' should do. But old habits die hard and she was quite often addressed, in those early days, as 'Madam Prime Minister, Sir'. Frank Moraes thought this appropriate as he had, from

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Shastri's time, wryly observed that Indira Gandhi was the only man in the Cabinet!

*

One of the first things I had been told, in great confidence, by Asoka Mehta and Subramaniam on joining was that the government was soon to devalue the rupee as part of a larger package of reform and aid. The decision had been taken in Shastri's time, but had been put off on account of the Indo-Pakistan war and Shastri's sudden demise. The decision was linked to the foreign exchange and food crises, the need to push exports and curb imports, and the initiation of measures to promote agricultural production, productivity and research through improved inputs, support prices and increased irrigation. Action by the government was to be matched by a substantial aid package to sustain the programme. Only eight or ten persons were in the know, and it was important to prepare the ground and counter the expected backlash.

The prime minister was to visit the United States on 19 March 1966 to tie up the aid package with Lyndon Johnson, who was willing to assist on conditions that ensured performance. I was asked to go to the US in advance, skipping the PM's meeting with De Gaulle en route, in order to 'sniff the air' and chat up the media.

I pleaded that well before such a visit, an inter-ministerial preparatory group should be constituted, and speech-writing taken in hand after considering relevant policy issues including such matters as India's view on the US bombing of Vietnam, a projected rise in our defence expenditure, the food prospects and the quantum and flow of PL 480 wheat shipments, the outlines of the new agricultural policy and the quantum and nature of the aid consortium-World Bank assistance package linked to devaluation. I was amazed to find how little preparation had commenced. There was a lack of clarity on key policy issues and little coordination. It was every frog in his own well.

Even on devaluation, I was concerned at the very close circuit of insiders that excluded such key players as the Congress president, the commerce minister and the commerce secretary. Even Sushital Bannerjee, joint secretary to the PM and a key aide, was kept in the dark. K.N. Raj, then director of the Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum, was among the two or three outsiders consulted. The date and quantum of devaluation merited confidentiality in order to avoid speculation. But for the rest, it was difficult to understand the paranoia about secrecy. Even critical policy makers and key players, whose responsibility it would be to carry the reform through politically and implement it purposefully, were kept out.

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The PM, with not much grounding in political economy, did not really comprehend the intricacies of devaluation and the related aid and policy package that had been put together and negotiated by the experts. Her instincts told her that there would be a sharp political recoil, but she was persuaded to believe she could somehow manage.

Devaluation was not the only matter that left her in a quandary. The licensing of six large fertiliser plants to be built by the American firm, Bechtel, and a clutch of measures calculated to give a fillip to agricultural productivity that would result in enhanced food production and a time horizon by when India might be liberated from dependence on PL 480 and other grain imports were among the cluster of issues that confronted Mrs G. Views were divided but there was a lurking apprehension that this could be the thin edge of the wedge to prise the Indian economy away from socialism.

*

Before I could get a fix on domestic and foreign policy and begin drafting the PM's US speeches, two crises intervened. The Mizo National Front (MNF) led by Laldenga staged a revolt in Mizoram (then the Lushai Hills District of Assam), capturing Aizawl on 1 March 1966 and declaring independence. This followed restiveness at inadequate famine relief in the wake of the *mautam* or the twelve-year cycle of bamboo flowering, which leads to a huge increase in the population of rodents. These go on to devour the crops and cause a shortage of food.

The Army went into action. The Air Force strafed the rebel positions in Aizawl, which was soon retaken, and Lungleh and other towns secured. The civil population was regrouped in Protected and Progressive Villages, or so-called strategic hamlets, along the main north-south road axis to deny the rebels food and shelter, an undoubtedly harsh tactic earlier employed by General Templar in Malaya (now Malaysia) and subsequently tried in the Naga Hills. Simultaneously, word came of Left extremist agitation, which soon manifested itself in the Naxal uprising in North Bengal, something that China, then engulfed in Mao's cultural revolution, was to characterise as a clap of spring thunder. The Left in India was in the process of splintering with rival pro-Soviet and pro-China factions locked in a fratricidal ideological struggle. The situation in West Bengal too appeared volatile.

Mrs G decided to fly to Calcutta and Gauhati (now Guwahati) for a closer appreciation of events and was accompanied by the home secretary, L.P. Singh, Sushital Bannerjee, the Intelligence Bureau director and myself. We were briefed at Raj Bhavan by the chief minister, the

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inspector general of police, and the Eastern Army commander, General Sam Manekshaw. It was agreed that a show of firmness was essential, especially after the inspector general of police flourished a piece of paper purporting to be plans for an extreme left-wing revolutionary movement.

The next morning, we flew to Gauhati and conferred at the airport with Chief Minister Chaliha, and his officials, Dev Kanta Barooah, Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh and key military officials. The director, Intelligence Bureau, said that the government had intimation of the Mizo uprising and had ordered two additional Assam Rifles battalions to move to Aizawl, but that getting wind of this Laldenga had probably determined on a pre-emptive strike.

The Mizo uprising was finally ended with an accord negotiated by Rajiv Gandhi, in 1986. The Naxal revolt was crushed in the Bengal countryside by 1970, but it took another two years for its urban guerrilla manifestation to be obliterated from West Bengal.

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Back to Delhi and a mad rush preparing for the US visit. There was no clear line on the US bombing in Vietnam, which had caused grave disquiet in India and the Third World. In Parliament, Hiren Mukherji, the CPI MP, recited the Bengali lines that captured the national mood: *Tero nam, Mero nam, Viet Nam, Viet Nam*. The foreign secretary, C.S. Jha, advocated a middle line, with T.N. Kaul, another secretary in the ministry, taking the 'Soviet line' and B.K. Nehru, our ambassador in Washington, adopting the 'US line'. Mrs G waffled, her heart leaning to the Left, her head cocked to the Right. India was expected to give a lead both as a major non-aligned nation and as chairman of the International Control Commission for Indo-China. I was all for an unambiguous line, condemning the bombing but combining this with a Vietnamese undertaking to end Viet Cong infiltration into South Vietnam.

The debate raged fiercely and my drafts swung like a pendulum gone wild. Several conferences were held, many continuing late into the night and right up to our arrival at Williamsburg, a lovely colonial heritage township used by the US administration for stopovers by state guests, to help them overcome their jet lag, before flying to Washington by helicopter for the formal state reception.

Before my departure, at one infructuous late-night conference at the PMH, the PM rose around midnight and said she was going to bed. Before leaving she turned and said, 'George, you have heard us all. Now go write the speech.' I was dumbfounded! I wrote the 'final' draft

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of the four main US speeches before departing for Washington, handing over one set to L.K. Jha and carrying another for B.K. Nehru.

The debate was resumed at Williamsburg, with B.K. Nehru present. As before, the three rival lines were repeated back and forth, B.K. Nehru arguing that the American PL 480 and aid package to India could be in jeopardy unless LBJ, who was facing a difficult situation at home over Vietnam, was given an 'out'. In the end, B.K. Nehru carried the day. The PM went soft on Vietnam, but the line was partly reversed in Moscow.

Another crisis was provoked by the American proposal to set aside a substantial quantum of PL 480 counterpart (rupee) funds (from the sale of US grain in India) to establish a $300-million Indo-US Foundation, with 8 American and 8 Indian directors, primarily to fund educational and cultural projects. This encountered stiff Leftist opposition on the ground that it would enable the Americans to conquer India's intellectual and cultural mindspace, much as the East India Company or Macaulay had done.

B.K. Nehru thought that the proposition had been put on ice, but was surprised to learn that the White House aide dealing with the matter had told me that LBJ planned to make a grand announcement. A hurried rearguard action was attempted, but to no avail. LBJ made the announcement in his banquet speech and the PM, ill-briefed, welcomed it, only to call for careful consideration of its implications in subsequent statements. Back in India there was uproar, with cries of 'sell-out' and denunciations of 'US Imperialism'. Delhi University dons issued a statement denouncing the foundation. In the end, the project was put on the back burner.

LBJ, a giant of a man, was most solicitous of his guest and walked her down from the White House to Blair House where she was staying. He also gatecrashed into the Indian Embassy where B.K. Nehru was entertaining the PM and her delegation to dinner. As one wag put it, 'It took the Indian prime minister to visit Washington to reveal the gentleman in LBJ.' The other quip that did the rounds was that the visit provided the first occasion for a US President to address a visiting head of government as 'Honey'! At LBJ's banquet, Isaac Stern, the violinist, gave a virtuoso performance after which the dancing began. LBJ gallantly approached Mrs G and asked for a dance, which she demurely declined, saying, 'Oh, what would my people think!'

Social niceties apart, the visit went off reasonably well. Attendance was good, and people were curious to know about arguably the most powerful woman in the world. She had tête-à-têtes with LBJ in the White House, followed by full delegation talks at which Dean Rusk and

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Chester Bowles, the US ambassador in Delhi, participated. LBJ set out the US world view, which was then dominated by Vietnam, and the PM spoke about the situation in India, and what we were doing to overcome the food crisis. What struck me forcefully, at the time, was the Americans' utter surprise at our lack of contact with the Chinese, even as they were engaged in continuous and searching discussions with them in Warsaw.

The US finally promised 3.5 million tons of grain to tackle the drought and the PM left New York on 31 March for London, where there was a brief halt for talks with Harold Wilson. Then, on to Moscow, where we were met at the airport by Premier Kosygin, and driven off to dachas on the Lenin Hills. The PM had a long dinner session with Kosygin during which Soviet aid, including assistance for the proposed Bokaro Steel Plant, was discussed. The Soviets did not take kindly to the Indo-US Foundation and were concerned about US and other rightist pressures on India.

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Back home, even as the drought loomed large, attention turned to devaluation as D-Day approached, following a final round of consultations with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and donor nations. Swaran Singh, the foreign minister, who had been told about it was aghast. Since the PM felt uncertain of carrying the Cabinet, she asked L.K. Jha to suggest an alternative strategy. LK showed me the paper he had done. He advocated a floating exchange, a bonus voucher scheme and some fiscal measures. The package would, he felt, be more cumbersome and less effective than devaluation. But it was feared that devaluation might give the Opposition an electoral handle. If the PM insisted, the Congress might split with some heavyweights throwing in their lot with Morarji.

The other option was that, if challenged, the PM could advise the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha and call for elections in October. I favoured this course, as did Asoka Mehta and Subramaniam, and worked on a broadcast titled 'Operation Phoenix'. Though the food situation remained critical, it was argued that the patient might withstand surgery now better than later, and that devaluation should be seen as a means of national rejuvenation.

Word leaked about a full Cabinet meeting having been called on 2 June. The press, however, speculated that this was to discuss the Punjab crisis, as the Akalis were getting increasingly insistent on the Punjabi suba. The other view was that a rift had developed on the question of the Fourth Plan size and that it needed to be sorted out. Even Sushital

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asked me if I knew what the brouhaha was about. I guiltily played dumb. On 2 June, the PM called me to the South Block and said, 'Now that you are privy to one top secret, I am letting you into another. You remember telling me to hold early elections. Well, I'm advising the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha so that I can go to the people. Put that in the broadcast too.'

The separation of the Lok Sabha polls from the general elections to the state assemblies was seen as a wily stratagem to dilute opposition to devaluation. A few hours later, Seshan called to say that the broadcast was off! Still later, LK was on the line asking me to prepare a broadcast on devaluation. Chavan was for it. The IMF and the World Bank were being formally notified of an announcement within the next forty-eight hours. Kamaraj had said no to Operation Phoenix as he believed it would cost the Congress the elections. Meanwhile, Mrs G was worried that Kamaraj wanted to be prime minister. President Radhakrishnan asked him about his alleged ambition, to be told that language (his inability to speak either Hindi or English fluently) precluded his becoming prime minister.

The Cabinet met on Sunday, 5 June 1966. Doubts and cautions were expressed and there was some expected waffling, but the final decision favoured devaluation. Manubhai Shah, the commerce minister, was particularly unhappy. He had been kept in the dark though his ministry would feel the brunt of the decision. Kamaraj was informed immediately thereafter. He was adamant in opposition and called it a 'sell out'. On Subramaniam describing him as 'a wounded tiger', LK's comment was, 'Well, in the circumstances, you know the rules of shikar, shoot to kill.'

I met the PM at 6 p.m. that evening. She had seen *Dr Zhivago* the night before, and later, *Those Magnificent Young Men in Their Flying Machines*, to take her mind off problems nearer home. She was tense and tired and said, 'I'm scared stiff.' She worried that, with Kamaraj opposed, the party might split and she would be held responsible. I said she had taken the right course. People expected decision and leadership. 'I hope you chaps are right,' she muttered in reply. I recalled that she had been greatly taken with a poem by the famous Spanish bullfighter, Domingo Ortega, sent her by Asoka Mehta, about the loneliness of decision-making at the top, which John Kennedy had cited during the Cuban missile crisis. It ran:

Bullfight lovers ranked in rows
Crowd the enormous plaza full.
But only one man really knows,
And he's the man who fights the bull.

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The storm broke the next day. The headlines and editorials were mixed. The machinery of government took time to swing into action given the elements of secrecy and total surprise, while the aid package took time to unfold, thus causing avoidable hiccups. In the event, the results of devaluation fell short of what had been projected.

The prime minister felt let down. As a novice she had shown implicit trust in her advisers, some of the most acclaimed economists and administrators in the land. And they had let her down. She had thrown the political gauntlet but her technical experts had not delivered as expected. Who now could she trust but her own instincts and her family? This was a psychological turning point that was to shape her future attitude. Indira Gandhi turned inwards and like Joan of Arc, whom she often cited as one of her heroines, began to listen to 'inner voices'. The outward bonhomie and charm remained but, inwardly, she became increasingly suspicious and aloof and somewhat more radically-populist. By the time the Emergency was declared in 1975, it was hard to disagree with the quip that Mrs Gandhi's socialism was 'a little Left of self-interest'! But in 1966, the mutation had only just commenced.

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Several issues demanded the prime minister's attention. General elections were due to be held in 1967, and she sensed that the churning and factionalism within the party could challenge her leadership. There were also pressing issues of administrative reform and economic policy and defence planning after the 1965 war, China's going nuclear (1964) and the international build-up for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Among other things, it aimed to limit the spread of nuclear weapons by restricting their possession to those countries that had tested them before 1967, which would not include later entrants in the field, such as India.

China's third nuclear explosion (on 9 May 1966) and the official reaction to it left me with the impression that the government had simply not thought the problem through. As in much else, thinking was compartmentalised and a holistic view was lacking. I did a note for the PM suggesting a broad-based study, building on the Opposition's demand in the Lok Sabha for a firm commitment to 'build a bomb' and Swaran Singh's reply that we intended to develop the know-how and technical capability for the purpose. This was perhaps the first public commitment, howsoever vague, to developing a nuclear option.

Homi Sethna, of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), happened to drop by and was concerned that the AEC was being administratively

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hamstrung. I spoke to him about doing some brainstorming on the nuclear question and invited him to lunch the following day with S. Gopal, Romesh Thapar (then a close confidante of Mrs G), Pitamber Pant and K. Subrahmanyam, then with the Department of Defence Production.

Sethna talked about the wherewithal and costs and gave a time estimate of five years for a nuclear test and the development of a delivery system. Subbu and Gopal believed that once China's capability increased, the US nuclear guarantee would be much less effective and, therefore, could not be relied upon implicitly. Pitamber was concerned about the cost of an Indian nuclear programme even after offsetting the technological gains. We dispersed after agreeing to put together a paper, with Sethna doing the technological part, Subbu covering the security dimensions, and Gopal spelling out the diplomatic implications.

I reported the discussion to Mrs G and L.K. Jha. At a meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission in Bombay a week later, at which Vikram Sarabhai was named the new chairman of the AEC and secretary, atomic energy, in place of the late Homi Bhabha, tentative approval was given for the study of a nuclear weapons programme and missile system.

Lal Bahadur Shastri had approved a project to develop the necessary technology for a bomb, but had stopped short of agreeing to a test. Also, with Bhabha's tragic death in an air crash, the project had gone into limbo. In December 1966, Vikram Sarabhai told me that a decision had been taken to go ahead with an Indian Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) project that had been on hold, so as to ensure a credible nuclear option. Vikram himself was, however, opposed to the bomb. His alternative was that we should not sign the NPT but offer a parallel assurance of our intention not to go nuclear.

Meanwhile, discussions commenced on the position we should adopt on the proposed nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The Americans sought to deflect India from going nuclear and advocated rapprochement with Pakistan and a cut in defence expenditure.

L.K. Jha had brought word back from Moscow that Kosygin's view was that if India signed the NPT, China would not be able to blackmail us because any Chinese nuclear threat to India would invite international reprisals through the UN, with Soviet participation. Shortly thereafter, LK was sent on a mission to Washington, London, Paris and Moscow to seek such a formal guarantee. An Asian security seminar conducted by the Indian Council of World Affairs in April found many speakers favouring an independent nuclear deterrent. Hriday Nath Kunzru,

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presiding, opposed the signing of the NPT as that would have made us dependent on the superpowers to fend off the Chinese.

I did a note for the PM urging a White Paper on the NPT, which would present a rounded picture of the Indian position, touching on disarmament, security and the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. I felt we would be in a bind if we blandly implied willingness to sign the NPT, subject to guarantees. Ours was a more nuanced position, seeking a guarantee by all N-powers against an N-threat to any non-N power, with a five-year review clause and a three-month withdrawal clause.

On the question of inspection, we would be willing to consider an international audit of fissile material inventories with the right to veto any particular inspector, such as a Pakistani assigned to India. Previously, the Soviets had not been too keen on inspection but had changed their view on account of suspicions about West German intentions. The debate continued. Soon thereafter, the NPT was signed, India abstaining.

On Buddha Purnima, 1974, the world was told that the 'Buddha smiled' as India conducted a 'peaceful' nuclear test at Pokhran.

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If the nuclear question and external affairs engaged official attention, the internal security situation had begun to ring alarm bells. Law and order had been reviewed at a meeting of chief ministers in April. Reference was made to the abuse of the Defence of India Rules (DIR), but there seemed to be some reluctance to lift the Emergency under which it had been promulgated in 1962, in view of the deteriorating food situation, inflation, Left extremism (resulting from intoxication with China's Cultural Revolution) and student agitation. Bengal and Kerala were focal points.

The year 1966 was a troubled one. A Hill agitation threatened Assam. The Akalis demanded a Punjabi suba. UP Government employees were on strike and had to be lathi charged in the Secretariat when they tried to mob the chief secretary. Police restiveness was signalled with the Delhi Police insisting on unionisation. There was a student agitation in Delhi. Calcutta University would soon shut down for a while. There had been some communal disturbances and the Jana Sangh and its affiliated Gau-Raksha Samiti were agitating for a ban on cow slaughter with various sants going on a 'fast unto death'. And a ration cut was contemplated to match available food supplies.

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At this juncture, with devaluation out of the way, the PM determined to breathe life into the non-aligned movement. She felt it could best be done by strengthening ties with Nasser and Tito, and so decided to visit the UAR and Yugoslavia. That was to be followed by a state visit to Moscow to balance the Washington visit. Briefings and speech-writing commenced and, once again, revealed the lack of thinking and coordination that prevailed within the government. I suggested that the PM privately urge Nasser to seek better relations with Israel. To this she replied: 'Our Muslims wouldn't like it.' This, I thought, was as mistaken as her response to a question asked in Washington earlier about Indo-Israel relations being governed by the large number of Arab votes we sought over Kashmir. I found our Kashmir-centric foreign policy disturbing, and pleaded that we must assume a leading role in South-east Asia and come up with a peace initiative for Vietnam. I spelt this out in a draft broadcast I prepared for the PM.

This called for an immediate Geneva Conference, stopping the bombing of Vietnam, cessation of hostilities and hostile acts on the ground, policing of the standstill arrangement by the International Control Commission (which India chaired, with Canada and Poland as members), withdrawal of all foreign forces, making all of Indo-China a neutral zone, and a development and reconstruction programme. In addition, there was a call for an end to French nuclear testing in the South Sea Islands. The broadcast was recorded, but the passage relating to the French testing was dropped. The next day, the US, UK, Soviet, Polish, Canadian, DRVN, UAR and Yugoslav ambassadors were summoned and briefed on the Vietnam proposals. Their reactions were cautiously favourable.

Earlier, the PM had expressed the wish that the Cairo speeches be shown to Clovis Maksud, the Arab League representative in Delhi. I protested and managed to block any such vetting. Tikki (T.N.) Kaul had, meanwhile, settled for an interview by the PM with *Al Ahram*, the leading Cairo newspaper. The catch was that Clovis was the *Al Ahram* correspondent in Delhi and had prepared both the questions and answers, which Tikki had seen and approved. He now wanted me to secure Mrs G's approval! I was flabbergasted at this outsourcing of foreign policy.

We flew to Bombay and on to Cairo on the night of 7 July, and on arrival early the next morning were lodged at the Kubbeh Palace on the outskirts of the city. Nasser called at noon for a one-to-one discussion with the PM. He was greatly exercised over the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, an international Islamist movement from Jakarta to Morocco.

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The full delegations met formally the next morning. Nasser expressed disappointment with the non-aligned movement which he found weak, divided and confused. The death of Nehru and the India-China conflict had wounded the movement, which had been further weakened by a US-Soviet détente and indiscriminate admissions to the club. He did not think the time was ripe for a Geneva Conference on Vietnam and believed that US bombing by itself would not escalate matters, but an invasion of DRVN would. He also offered to mediate in the India-China conflict and concluded with a masterful survey of the African scene. We failed to offer a matching world view. It was agreed that preparations should be made for a tripartite India-UAR-Yugoslav summit in Delhi, in October, to initiate a new beginning for the non-aligned movement.

That evening we watched the son et lumiere at Giza. There was a recorded commentary by Laurence Olivier. Speaking through the Sphinx he said, 'Man fears Time, and Time fears the pyramids.' There followed a wonderful panorama of Egyptian history and culture. Thereafter, we repaired to the Cheops Pavilion as Nasser's guests for a sumptuous repast accompanied by much belly-dancing.

The following morning we flew to Yugoslavia, and headed for Pula on the North Dalmatian coast. We were met by Tito and boarded his personal motor boat and headed for his retreat, Brioni, a lovely wooded island full of flowers, deer, elk and other domesticated game. Once again, the speeches were chopped and changed and, at the PM's request, abridged, with everybody having a go at it. Consequently, I could give the PM her banquet speech only half-an-hour after dinner had commenced. What an absurd way to function! The Yugoslavs were cautious on Vietnam and said they could not commit themselves to our idea of a Geneva Conference without consulting Ho Chi Minh.

Tito wanted to strengthen the non-aligned movement by giving representation to 'progressive movements' within the aligned world. The PM agreed, much to my surprise. I thought this was a dangerous gambit and would be seen as interference in the internal affairs of others and something that could recoil. Swaran Singh explained the Indian position on Kashmir; but here, too, the Yugoslavs were cautious and wrangled over the language of the joint press release. Again I discerned no world view in our expositions, only tired slogans. The day was retrieved by an evening cruise in Tito's personal yacht along the coast of the Istrian peninsula.

Swaran Singh's private secretary, Bains, was utterly charmed by the lovely setting. He gave vent to the hidden muse that obviously dwelt deep within his heart and penned an ode to Brioni, the opening lines of

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which read, 'O Brioni! O Brioni!' I received a personal copy and found that copies had been marked to Tito and Nasser. This obviously was Bains' finest hour. The only other poetic outburst that matched this effort was to come later when Mrs V.V. Giri penned a paean of praise to Mrs G titled, 'O My Darling Daughter!' Know ye all that the IA to the PM necessarily had to trade in much dull paper; but he was also the fortunate repository of works that had intimations of immortality.

We took off the next morning for Moscow, a stodgy contrast to the architectural grace we had seen along the Dalmatian coast. The ever-courteous Kosygin was at the airport and we took the same ride to the dacha on Lenin Hills. En route, the Moscow speeches were rehearsed and mangled. The portions about South-east Asia and the new regional groupings in the making, precursors to ASEAN that I had long insisted we should notice favourably, were removed on the plea that the Soviets would not like such a reference. I was aghast at how Indian foreign policy was formulated!

At the summit and delegation talks, the Soviets were reticent on our Vietnam initiative though L.K. Jha gently suggested that we were proposing a Geneva Conference in much the same spirit as they had proposed the Tashkent Conference. The advance text of Kosygin's remarks at the Great Kremlin Hall, which had been handed to us, was strongly critical of the US on Vietnam. It said that there would be war if the Americans bombed Hanoi or Haiphong or crossed the 17th parallel. On the other hand, we had been charged by the US to tell the Soviets that should any American pilot shot down over Vietnam be tried as a war criminal, the bombing would intensify exponentially.

Swaran Singh met Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, separately and extracted from him an assurance that the Soviets would dissuade Pakistan from going to the Security Council on Kashmir. Moscow, however, asked us to consider the supply of some Soviet arms to Pakistan on condition that the latter quit SEATO and CENTO and agreed to enter into a No-War Pact with India.

Kosygin hosted a banquet that night at the Kremlin. We assembled in the Vladamir Hall, adjourned to the Banquet Hall for dinner and then moved to King George's Hall for coffee. I was seated between two Soviet battleaxes who spoke no English, and so spent the evening admiring the impressive murals and refurbished icons, over caviar. As we headed back home the next day, I ruminated over the haphazard manner in which the government functioned and the PM's inexperience in so many matters.

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu
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Dated 4.4.12.

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The India-UAR-Yugoslav Tripartite Summit took place in Delhi, as planned, in October 1966. As usual the joint communiqué had already been drafted and we again went through the hoop over the speeches. The PM was up till 12.30 a.m. at her residence going through these, and I left the PMH after getting the final texts ready at 2.15 a.m. Further amendments followed early the next morning, and the approved texts were delivered to the two visiting delegations by 10 a.m. so that they could draft appropriate responses. For once advance copies of the PM's speech were ready, but then the mikes failed while she was speaking and many of her remarks were, consequently, inaudible! The tripartite talks largely covered familiar ground, and there was agreement that the finance ministers should meet to discuss how best to promote economic coordination.

I was disappointed that our concerns at these and similar meetings were too narrowly focused and geared to discussing immediate problems and crises, and not sufficiently forward looking. I had done a paper suggesting we think of a post-Vietnam future. What kind of Asia did we desire or foresee? The British were planning to withdraw 'East of the Suez' and also to convert their 'British Indian Ocean Territories' into a joint Anglo-US facility for the exercise of air, sea and nuclear power. (The Diego Garcia base was in fact established soon after.) If the US, too, were to withdraw after a Vietnam settlement, would there be a power vacuum and would it be filled by China? Should we not look more kindly on Thailand in view of the troubles in its ethnic minority-dominated north-east region, which was being penetrated by China, and could threaten Burma along another axis?

Should we rule out a Sino-Soviet rapprochement and the more remote possibility of a sudden Sino-US understanding? Should not the non-aligned do more to woo Latin America, which was in ferment and resentful of the US? And finally, on economic matters, if the Soviet Union could invite Fiat to build a large automobile unit on its soil with possible US Export-Import Bank funding, why should not we act similarly in terms of foreign investment and contemplate joint investment with others. (Tito did in fact suggest a joint Fiat investment in India, the UAR and Yugoslavia, with each country specialising in certain parts and components to achieve economies of scale.) And could these same three countries not jointly undertake capacity building in Africa by setting up regional medical, engineering and industrial training institutes? Unfortunately, all such ideas were so much water off a duck's back.

More foreign dignitaries visited India and the PM continued going on foreign tours; but I was not certain how well those occasions were used,

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as much time was spent in trite exchanges. The PM called on royal visitors at Rashtrapati Bhavan, where the *aabdars* seemed to have forgotten their training, compelling me to pen a note to LK for onward transmission:

> (The staff) do not know when to serve refreshments and in what order . . . Both on the occasion of the visit of the King of Laos and, earlier, on the occasion of the visit of the King of Afghanistan, the waiters started at one end of the line and worked their way around in sequence without following correct protocol. In the result, tea, other refreshments and cigarettes were first offered to junior officials of the visiting delegation, who refused with considerable alarm and embarrassment since they obviously could not precede their King. This created great awkwardness on the occasion of the King of Afghanistan's visit. More recently, during talks between the PM and the King of Laos, tea was offered to the King while he was speaking. He brushed aside the waiter as he did not wish to be interrupted at that moment. Tea was then served to other members of the Laotian delegation, who naturally refused since the King had not partaken of anything. Meanwhile, tea was also served to all members of the Indian delegation. The result was that not a single Laotian took tea while the entire Indian delegation, seated opposite, had tea and something to eat as well.

I felt this reflected poorly on our hospitality and conduct, and could quite easily be corrected with a bit of training.

The other foreign visits I undertook with the PM were to Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. The South-east Asian visit took place before the original ASEAN five had become Tigers. The Indian attitude towards them was condescending.

Australia, with its vast expanses, was another experience, not least because Mrs G was adamant about not formally curtseying three times before the governor general, who represented the queen, both while meeting him and taking his leave. She was full of pride and said she represented the Republic of India and would not bow before any sovereign.

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The unfolding events at home, however, were the ones that held centre stage. Come November and Asoka Mehta was lamenting the drift, with the PM in 'retreat' after devaluation. She knew she must fight to hold

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her own against the party oligarchs and win the forthcoming general elections. The food situation continued to be worrying. The agitation for a steel plant at Vizag (Vishakapatnam), for which no resources were available, had led to rioting. Pressures to ban cow slaughter were mounting and while the PM was opposed to what she regarded as obscurantism, she tended to acquiesce tactically so as not to give an electoral handle to the opposition.

As these issues gathered momentum and the crises deepened, a no-confidence motion was moved in the Lok Sabha. To defuse the situation, Gulzarilal Nanda, the home minister, announced that the states were being advised to legislate a ban on cow slaughter on the lines of the UP Act, which permitted the slaughter of animals over fifteen years of age, if licensed as unserviceable. The agitators demanded more. The issue was forced on 7 November when the PM was due to reply. The Jana Sangh, RSS, Arya Samaj, Sadhu Samaj and others organised a 150,000 strong procession down Parliament Street and moved to gherao Parliament House. The crowd surged forward and was met with a lathi charge followed by brick-batting, tear-gassing and firing, as the situation spiralled out of control. AIR, Transport Bhavan, Gole Maket, Kamaraj's house, banks, cinema theatres and cars were vandalised and set on fire by rampaging mobs. Four persons were killed and twenty-two injured.

The PM was firm in her reply to the no-confidence motion, which was overwhelmingly rejected. The Jana Sangh and its affiliates used the occasion to project themselves in the south as a Hindu rather than a Hindi party, even as the debate on the official language continued to rage.

The riots and Nanda's handling of it steeled the PM's resolve to effect a Cabinet change, which had been pending for some time. In the end, only Nanda was dropped with Y.B. Chavan, the Maharashtra chief minister, replacing him. When the dust had settled, the reshuffle was seen as much ado about nothing but for Chavan's induction. The exercise left many uneasy.

Governance in Bihar had broken down with party and caste schisms that had paralysed the administration at a time of extreme distress on account of the drought. The option of imposing President's Rule was considered seriously, and then put off. There was a move to give up land revenue altogether, but apart from a loss of some Rs 110 crore of net revenue, revenue receipts were the only documents many peasants possessed to establish cultivation rights. I advocated a national student service scheme as an antidote to restiveness in universities, and in order to inculcate some social values among the youth by confronting them with the challenges of drought and development.

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The PM was visiting Bihar and UP and I felt such an announcement would be appropriate. LK wanted the matter to be vetted by the finance ministry first. In Gorakhpur, however, the divisional commissioner had already ordered schools to close and mobilised students to dig kachcha wells, with good results. By December, 36,000 school students and some 250 undergraduates had dug 6,500 wells in the division.

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Though Punjab and Haryana had come into being, tensions continued over the future of Chandigarh, which Punjab claimed, and Abohar-Fazilka, a Hindi-speaking tract embedded within Punjab to which Haryana sought access through a corridor. On 15 December, Sant Fateh Singh, the Akali leader, commenced an indefinite fast with a threat of self-immolation, prompting a counter fast by some Arya Samajis.

Appeals to the sant to end his fast lest it fan communal passions fetched a plaintive complaint from the private secretary to the Puri Shankaracharya, now thirty days into *his* fast for a total ban on cow slaughter, that no one had similarly approached the Jagadguru to end his ordeal, a fact immediately contradicted by Chavan! The government refused to be coerced by these fasts. By the end of the year, however, an understanding had been reached with both. The sant agreed to arbitration by the PM, on all issues, while Jain Sushil Muni, a respected spiritual leader, had stepped in to propose a solution to cool the gau-raksha agitation.

The formula I thought would work was for Chandigarh to go to Punjab while Haryana was rewarded with a fine new capital. Further, after Partition and the loss of Lahore, Delhi had become north-west India's wholesale mandi, an untidy and burdensome arrangement. In the circumstances, a new Haryanvi capital could become the industrial and communications pivot of the north-west region and a counter-magnet to Delhi, which Chandigarh was never designed to be. That logic still holds. Central funding should not have been an issue as India is urbanising and new towns and city expansions are inevitable. Unfortunately, the impasse persists and has sadly degenerated into a water war as well.

At the other end of the country, the Hill State agitation gathered momentum with the Naga leader A.Z. Phizo demanding an independent Naga homeland and the continuing Mizo insurgency. Assam was determined to assert its cultural identity and ward off cross-border infiltration, an issue that was to explode a decade later. The problem was that few in Delhi seemed to have much idea of, or interest in, the

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North-east. Band-aid solutions would not do and there was none to think boldly or take a longer view.

The home, defence and external affairs ministries, then looking after the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area, were locked in a turf war and came up with three papers expressing divergent views. Troubled by this incoherence, I did a note stating that the North-east must be treated as an integrated whole, but we should concede well-considered historical formations on the basis of dividing to unite. This could be achieved by conceptualising these smaller entities as building blocks in a regional superstructure with strong overall links to ensure coordination and cooperation, reflecting geo-political and geo-strategic realities. But the trouble with the government was that everybody was so busy dealing with or fending off the immediate that few had the time to develop a longer and more holistic vision, taking into account both the internal and external environment.

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The leftists were set on a revolutionary path, and yet found themselves polarised along the ideological divide between the Soviet and Chinese lines. They threatened bandhs and strikes and a projected march on Parliament in the name of the 'people'.

Also, post-devaluation, 'pragmatism' or realism had acquired almost the same flavour of ideological abuse as 'revisionism' in China, with Subramaniam and Asoka Mehta being singled out as the arch-culprits who had sold out to the US. This was reinforced by the widening rift between Kamaraj and the PM with the Congress socialist forum of Young Turks leaning towards the former.

A more dangerous twist was given to the debate by Ram Manohar Lohia, a maverick demagogue who advocated 'socialism of the street', which he spelt out in *The Statesman*. He argued that parliamentary democracy would lack substance or dynamism unless an 'active minority' awakened the people to social injustice and took remedial action through 'street socialism'. This was a call for mob rule, anarchy and fascism.

As it is, the country was beset by student unrest, which seemed to be the result of a quantitative expansion of higher education in small towns and rural areas since 1950, accompanied by a qualitative decline, and not enough matching job opportunities. Labour indiscipline was similarly being fuelled by industrial expansion in hitherto remote areas and green-field sites lacking an industrial culture and the higher skills required. An added factor was the politicisation of labour, and outmoded labour laws and criteria for union recognition and registration. It

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resulted in intense inter-union rivalry and competitive wildcat strikes that periodically brought many public sector units to a standstill.

Employment was neglected in planning, with disastrous consequences—preferential treatment was demanded, often aggressively, for sons-of-the-soil. One example of this was the rash of attacks on non-Maharashtrians and their establishments, like Udipi restaurants, in Dadar, Bombay. The cry was, 'Employment for Maharashtrians!' And echoes of this continue to reverberate in various forms today, in Maharashtra and elsewhere.

The civil service too was beset with problems. It had been demoralised by instant criticism of decisions taken, and the emphasis on procedure rather than performance. Two cases concerning C. Subramaniam and S. Bhoothalingam, both dynamic administrators, agitated Parliament and the press for weeks on end following a Public Accounts Committee report. Both concerned alleged procedural lapses, which could at worst have been described as errors of judgment. Yet there was a demand for their heads. Ultimately, better sense prevailed and no malfeasance was established. Nevertheless, witch-hunting added to indecision within the government, with ministers and secretaries passing the buck and afraid to take decisions, as there were few, if any, to defend them.

Yet, the ICS/IAS was something of a closed shop, zealous of its turf and wary of interlopers, be they technocrats or lateral-entry recruits to the 'system'. Thus suggestions that Dr I.G. Patel fill the post of Secretary, Economic Affairs, in late 1967 aroused tribal passions in the civil services. I dashed off a note to the PM:

> It would be unfortunate were specialists, technical and professional people confirmed in the impression that they can never aspire to rise to the top, whatever their merit. This will mean that fewer and fewer specialists will want to enter the government or that they will seek to strike a bargain if and when they come. This too would be undesirable. Coming in the wake of Dr S.R. Sen's going away to the FAO after being overlooked for the post of Secretary, Planning Commission, (this) will be a test case.

In the event, IG's appointment went through. Likewise, Dr V. Ramalingaswami, then Professor of Pathology (and later director), All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, and an authority on malnutrition, was refused permission to attend a WHO conference in Jamaica. I sent off another note:

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> It seems extraordinary, even absurd, that Finance should arrogate to itself the right to determine scholarly participation in international medical research in which India is interested, or to usurp the right to decide who shall travel abroad and when, on non-financial grounds.

I believe Dr Ramalingaswami did go.

There was also an on-going battle between bureaucrats and technocrats on manning public sector units, with the former invariably being designated top dog, leading to the wry comment that the technocrat was 'always on tap, but never on top'.

It was to address such problems and the somewhat musty, slow-moving administrative ethos that I drew the PM's attention to Northcote Parkinson's Law of Delay, and urged that it be widely circulated within the government and to all chief ministers. I summarised Parkinson thus:

> The Abominable No-Man, who exists in every organisation, is being replaced by the Prohibitive Procrastinator who does not say 'no' but 'in due course' and achieves negation by delay. The Law of Delay, simply stated, is that Delay is the deadliest form of denial. Among methods of delay, the most honoured is 'comitology' or relegation to a committee reinforced by research. Thus 'fact-finding' becomes a substitute for decision as well as for thought and all the views expressed smother our thoughts in waves of irrelevance. We have to realise that decisions depend upon the existence of people with a general as well as a specialised knowledge, upon people who are often a Law unto Themselves, upon people who ask 'Why not?' more often than 'Why' ... The leader of today has many obstacles to overcome and Delay is often the worst of them.

I received many requests for Parkinson's Law from various quarters and I did my bit to prevent the Law of Delay operating in this case. Mrs G had a laugh but took the point.

I also made a strong plea for an improvement in current reporting within the government, and noted that 'the entire machinery of reporting within Government is terribly weak and archaic ... This is certainly true of the regular fortnightly/monthly reports received from Central Ministries, State Governments and Governors. I have been surprised by the utter superficiality and triviality of these "urgent" and "top-secret" reports.'

The PM did, thereafter, convene a meeting of all Union secretaries

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and spoke about expediting business through quicker decision-making, procedural simplification, shorter and crisper notings, more effective delegation and the disposal of certain matters at lower levels and within prescribed time schedules.

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Travelling with the PM to Calcutta, Gauhati, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Raipur, Bombay and Poona, I got the impression that she enjoyed immense personal popularity and was, therefore, well placed to go to the people over the heads of the party and Parliament. The crowds she drew displayed two notable features: a larger turn-out of women and the emergence of children and younger people as cheer-leaders.

The Left and Right had joined hands against her. This was the politics of power, a game not unknown to the Congress. The most powerful ideology at work in India and the world over is power. Ideology is, for the most part, the gift-wrapping around the power struggle. Therefore, the PM had to stand firm.

I believed that the country still needed the Congress in 1967, in the absence of any coherent alternative at the central (though not at the state) level; and within the Congress the 'bosses' needed the PM for electoral victory and power, more than she needed them. To her critics in the party, the PM had earlier given a stinging reply. She said she had learnt politics at the feet of her father and that those who used to oppose him in his lifetime should not now try and explain his policies to her. 'I shall stick to that policy only, which I consider to be in the best interests of the country. If you do not want me to continue in my post, you may remove me.'

The attacks on the PM were not merely political but also personal. Lohia's journal, *Mankind*, had a vicious attack on her titled, 'A Little Liar Rules the Land'. This was pegged to her saying she had faced police beatings since childhood, 'quarrelled' with Gandhi and carried the stamp of being born in the year of the Great October (Soviet) Revolution (1917). He was later to charge her with secreting a diamond necklace presented to her by the Saudi monarch, which she said had immediately been handed over to the Reserve Bank. Later still, there was a similar charge about a Russian mink coat.

*

When Mrs G assumed office early in 1966, she was diffident and unsure, and there were unkind whispers of her being a goongi gudiya or dumb doll. Such an impression was at best superficial, and was dispelled

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within the year as she grew into her job. She was not a great speaker but could be both eloquent and passionate when roused. For quite some time she needed props: either a learned saying or a reference to her father. She even went to Teen Murti House, on 14 March 1967, and sat in Jawaharlal Nehru's chair in the study (which was preserved exactly as he left it), when she needed his strength and inspiration.

A handsome woman of proud carriage, she exuded good taste and possessed a sense of humour. At home she wore simple cotton or khadi saris with no more than a dark bead necklace, and kept her head covered. On state occasions, and especially when travelling abroad, she would dig into her rich wardrobe and appear elegantly attired, wearing high heels, her face lightly made up, and hair smartly styled. She was photogenic when caught off guard but very camera-conscious. It took the government's official photographer at the Press Information Bureau weeks of diligent effort to capture the right angle and pose for the approved prime ministerial photograph that mandatorily adorns all offices, alongside those of the President and Gandhiji. She showed a preference for one of her profiles while being photographed, and was very conscious of her beaked nose and the faint tyres around her neck. While touring the countryside by car she would insist on turning up the floor lights, so that she could be seen to advantage by the crowds and photographed by the media.

On 8 February 1967, an election rally the PM addressed in Bhubaneshwar was stoned. Of a crowd of 50,000-75,000 that had gathered, a section of about 200 people started heckling her. The PM had concluded and the chief minister, Biju Patnaik, was on his feet when the heckling intensified. Mrs G took the mike and asked: 'Will you vote for people who throw stones and engage in disruption?' The crowd cheered, but just then she was hit by a rock. She remained on the rostrum for a while, bleeding, and was then escorted back to Raj Bhavan. The medical examination established a bruised upper lip, which was by now considerably swollen, and a 'minute crack on the nasal spine, without displacement'. I said I was sorry she was hurt.

'I've got a long nose, I know, but I don't want a crooked one. I'm not hurt, George. My vanity is hurt!' she responded.

On the return flight to Delhi, her face partially veiled to hide the bruise, she told the newsmen accompanying her, eyes twinkling, 'So now you know why *purdah-nishin* ladies veiled themselves: so that no one should know if they had been fighting with their husbands!' She had guts and a sense of humour.

Mrs G had taste and savoured the good things in life—food, books,

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theatre and music, films and exhibitions. She was conscious of her figure, would eat with gusto but lay off foods she thought were fattening. She liked mangoes and would carefully choose the ones she ate, 'to the disgust of my father, husband and sons' she had once said. It was evident that she doted on her sons, Rajiv, then at Imperial College, London, and Sanjay, apprenticed to Rolls Royce at Crewe.

Her work schedule, presumably like that of anyone in high office, was punishing. Newspapers and files to start the day; interviews at breakfast; public darshan between 9 and 10 a.m. Then to office, whether at the South Block or Parliament House; home for lunch, a short rest, if possible, and then back by three o'clock for interviews, meetings and other engagements until any time between half past six and eight. Then, she would either have a quiet dinner and work until ten or eleven, or dine out or have guests in. She would sometimes work past midnight and even receive people at that hour. I would often snatch short meetings with her during car rides or late evenings when she would be wearing curlers. She was informal and could relax easily, was generally unflappable and always found time for private friends. Her golden retriever meandered in and out of the room, a silent companion. She was painstaking to a fault, personally replying to letters and meticulously rewriting speeches and formal letters with an eye on language and ideas.

Her great qualities were sound instincts and common sense. She was more decisive than her father and could be ruthless in getting her way. She came to the job with considerable political background and general knowledge, but with little administrative experience or acquaintance with economic and technical affairs. Her understanding of foreign affairs was not very great. So she would depend on her advisers but not necessarily be led by the nose.

Mrs G could be disarmingly frank and would sometimes speak with brutal candour. She was generally brevity itself, often monosyllabic, and would doodle while listening to long-winded speeches, occasionally looking up to smile to indicate she was still there. Seasoned journalists, Indian and foreign, would seek interviews and plead with me for a half-hour slot, at least. They would be greeted with cryptic answers or a cute look. Many would start fidgeting after ten minutes, wondering what to say next and then make an early exit.

To reach out to a wider audience, the PM agreed to a monthly 'person to person' broadcast over AIR. I also wrote a weekly Opinion Survey in which I scanned the national and international media and brought to her notice important, interesting or amusing views and comments.

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The idea of a regular press conference did not work as the PM was not adept at this manner of communication. She would usually give monosyllabic answers, and not turn questions around to make a point. The monthly broadcasts too were seldom used as essays in persuasion and education on the vital issues of the day. They were treated more as a formality and almost a chore. The other big hurdle was language. The PM came across well in her simple Hindustani but this was anathema to the Hindi mandarins in I&B and AIR. So I would draft the basic English script, which would then do the rounds for comment and refinement, with the PM herself chipping and changing to the very end as was her wont. This would then be transcribed in Hindustani by Yash Pal Kapur.

On getting to Broadcasting House, Mrs G would be cordially received by the director general, AIR, Narayana Menon, a fine broadcaster himself, and would then be led like a lamb to the slaughter to where the Hindi specialists awaited her, brandishing their red pencils. The PM's carefully chiselled Hindustani speech would then be exultingly translated into AIR Hindi with the PM fighting a gallant rearguard action, but invariably yielding ground until sufficient incomprehension had been achieved.

The text would then be retyped triumphantly, and the PM would be led to the studio to record her broadcast. Difficult passages and jaw-breaking words would be transliterated by her in Roman and she would read the script resignedly, stumbling and faltering as she took the linguistic hurdles, one by one. Never has a prime minister been bullied by so few to bring distress to so many. Communication was lost.

One great advantage of being involved with the press conferences, broadcasts and speech-writing was that I had the freedom to summon information from all departments and states in the name of the prime minister. This freedom to get past sundry Abominable No-Men was liberally used for the higher education of the IA to the PM but perhaps, ultimately, to little national advantage. In my innocence as a somewhat uncivil interloper in the civil service I believed that if the prime minister said something three times, it would become policy. The folly and futility of such heretical thinking dawned on me gradually. The PM might say anything, but the subtle interpretation of her words by Prohibitive Procrastinators ensured that the even tenor of the Secretariat was never unduly disturbed.

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There was yet another device, essentially crafted by L.K. Jha and followed by his successor, Haksar, to enable the PM to reach out and solicit or advance new ideas. This was to convene a series of round tables on key issues. Several of these were held on science policy, tourism, and so on. The best minds in each field—administrators, planners, academics, industrialists and public sector managers—were invited. There would be no agenda and the PM would participate in plenary sessions. Much animated discussion took place in smaller working groups and a lot of ground was covered. Recommendations would then be processed and fed into the mill for further action.

The science round table meetings covered all fields. One speaker interpreted C.P. Snow's 'two cultures' in the Indian context as representing 'preservers' and 'implementers'. To this the PM added a third category—those who clung to superstition and tradition. Another speaker referred to the rise of a 'neo-Luddite' movement in India that was opposed to automation and the introduction of computers. This was dangerous and if India missed the second industrial revolution there would be a ten-fold widening of the technological gap within a decade.

During one of the meetings, Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, said that problems must be defined and prioritised and then backed with sufficient resources and inputs. For instance, it was estimated that by 1975 the international investment in atomic power was likely to be of the order of Rs 20,000 crore per annum. India was well placed to develop exports in such areas of advanced technology and had the capability to capture Rs 2000 crore of this business.

As a follow-up to the science round table, efforts were made to revivify the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Cabinet (SACC) and mention was made of setting up a Department of Technology.

I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary suggesting the constitution of SACC panels to consider nutritional requirements and technological possibilities; grain/food losses in the field and in transit, storage and processing; new methods of coal utilisation; water management, soil conservation and afforestation; rural water supply; a new programme to make villages livable; urbanisation and regional planning; reclaiming the Rajasthan desert; development of the resources of the North-east and Dandakaranya; script standardisation and the evolution of a standard keyboard. The list was long but the purpose was to get off the beaten track and achieve something worthwhile.

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Mainstream, then a critic of Mrs G, wrote that Lohia had propounded a theory about the Hindi controversy to the effect that it was a struggle between 'mid-landers and coast-landers'. However DMK's Annadurai felt Hindi was more a political than a language issue. 'With Hindi chauvinism goes a lot of obscurantism including Hindu revivalism and fads like cow-protection. The fate of Urdu in some Hindi-speaking states is sufficient proof that non-Hindi interests are never safe without constitutional guarantees.'

Pending the passage of a Constitution amendment bill on the official language stating that English 'shall' (not 'may') continue as an associate official language indefinitely, GOI had promulgated an Ordinance banning secessionism though E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker had already announced his intention to launch a movement for the secession of Tamil Nadu after the (1967) general election. The writing on the wall, *Mainstream* concluded, was both ominous and disquieting. Fortunately, the language issue gradually faded, and the DMK changed tack once reassured about the national language policy.

Of more seminal importance was the report of the Education Commission under Professor D.S. Kothari. This was the first time education in India was being looked at after the Sargent Report on school education on the eve of Independence and the Radhakrishnan Commission's report on university education.

I prepared a summary for the PM, urging urgent consideration. Education was and remains the very bedrock of economic and social progress. It is essential for the creation of a just society ensuring empowerment and equality of opportunity for all. Regrettably, universal education was neglected as Nehru gave more importance to higher education and believed that everybody would, in due course, be covered by the trickle-down effect. Nothing like that happened. The Education Commission now said that in fulfilment of the mandate of Article 45 of the Constitution, 'all areas of the country should be able to provide five years of good and effective education to all children by 1975-76, and seven years of such education by 1985'. The original target was 1960.

India's population crossed the 500 million mark, some time in the latter part of 1966. A student population of 70 million at the time would be 170 million by 1985. The commission stressed quality alongside quantity, with a vocational stream to match educated manpower with job availability. It recommended common schools in public education and mandated work experience through national service. Regional and social disparities in education were to be corrected through grants-in-aid, scholarships and other means. The three-language formula was

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favoured with English as the most important library language. An interesting suggestion was that some literature in each modern Indian language should be produced in both Devanagari and Roman scripts to facilitate cross-cultural learning. In the field of higher education, more centres of excellence and technical institutes were advocated.

Committees were formed. Ministers met. Consultations ensued. Not much was accomplished. There was little interest or electoral gain in education and some, perhaps, thought that too much education might be a dangerous thing. What would the lower classes think of themselves! Socialist bombast rang hollow.

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Despite little traction with regard to some of these major issues, I kept pursuing a number of other matters on the side. A visit to Jaisalmer impressed me with the cultural and tourist potential of the desert. I urged conservation of the tawny-gold city of Jaisalmer clustered around the citadel that rose above the plain, its magnificent havelis, and the abandoned Bishnoi settlements not too far away as a heritage complex that might be declared a National Treasure. What better locale than this for an annual desert festival, when the marvellous music and dance and arts and crafts of the region could be on display?

In Delhi, I canvassed for the conservation of the Nizamuddin complex with its amazing assortment of monuments as a heritage site, with the dargah and well-attended urs as its centrepiece. The space encompassed by the tombs of Ghalib, Abdur Rahim and Amir Khusrau could be named Kavi Durbar and made a cultural treasure of period architecture, performing arts and Mughlai cuisine. Similarly, Mehrauli village and the vast scattering of period ruins around the Qutab. Few cities in the world offer such a striking assemblage of built heritage redolent of living history. But we, alas, appear to lack a sense of history, and have allowed gracious and historic monuments to be vandalised.

These monuments and the surrounding environment could have been saved in the 1960s as the city had not yet cruelly swallowed them up. I remember being offered a flat on the Pandara Road crescent in 1952 from a Press Association quota for accredited journalists, but turning it down on Jamila's remonstrance that it was 'too far out of town'! The Golf Links colony had not yet been carved out from the Delhi Golf Club. When we did, finally, move to Pandara Road a year later, jackals would howl through the night and hyenas roamed through the undergrowth. Places like Kotla and Siri Fort set amidst yellow mustard fields in bloom were popular picnic spots, with the more adventurous venturing as far

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as the Qutab or the Okhla weir, Suraj Kund and even to Sultan Ghari, India's oldest Muslim tomb with its Kufic inscriptions.

Another hare I chased was a proposal to change the April-March budget year to October-September. The rationale was that since construction and much other activity was affected by the torrid summer and monsoon, a budget presented in February, passed in May-June and actually disbursed some months thereafter unduly constricted the working season. This entailed the loss of half the budget year and saw a sudden splurge of expenditure in March to prevent budget allocations from lapsing. The proposition therefore was that a budget year commencing in October would be more efficient, and could take account of the gamble-in-the-monsoon aspect of the Indian economy. These considerations might weigh less today in a more mechanised, computerised age but they did invite debate at the time and a change in the budget year was considered and shelved.

A third issue I pressed—working with people like Dr V. Ramalingaswami, soon to become the director of AIIMS—was that of consciously incorporating the nutrition factor in the agricultural and food distribution policy. A number of medical studies suggested that India's food crisis was not one of hunger alone but of malnutrition as well. It was found that enriched food supplements distributed as part of famine/scarcity relief, especially to young mothers and children did show positive results in terms of their weight, height and general health. So nutritional supplements went into school feeding programmes, and iodized salt and lysine and vitamin additives to wheat and bread were also popularised. The then public sector Modern Bread Ltd came into being in order to provide lysine bread. (A corollary to this was the promotion of diversified agriculture and kitchen gardening.)

A unique event marked the New Year. An opinion poll was held in Goa, Daman and Diu to determine its future—India's first and only referendum. Goans voted convincingly to retain their own identity as a separate political entity from Maharashtra. A larger national contest was to follow thereafter with the fourth general elections, the first after Nehru. Its outcome was expected to herald a new era. It was to this that attention now turned.

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5

A MANDATE FOR CHANGE

In 1967, with the approaching elections, the focus shifted to fashioning appropriate strategies at the hustings. Convinced that programmes must be matched by performance that justified and sustained power, which was otherwise no more than an end in itself, I got down to writing 'Mandate for Change' as a prospective policy guide. I discussed different aspects of it with colleagues and friends and passed around the finished draft for comment before formally sending it to the PM and L.K. Jha. The preamble, 'A Great Renewal', summarised the argument.

> The depressing political and economic trends in India during the past few years have engendered pessimistic forecasts that the forthcoming general elections might be the last before the country is overwhelmed by chaos, violence, hunger and economic insolvency, or is 'saved' by a coup. On the other hand, the proximity of the elections has rekindled hope of a Great Renewal and a New Beginning with an accession of strength and faith from a fresh mandate given by a new generation of Indians to a younger generation of national leadership ...
>
> The new broom must not only sweep wide and well, but soon, if it is to sweep clean at all.

I advocated the election of the leader directly by the parliamentary party rather than through the usual Congress process of 'consultation' and 'consensus'. This is manipulative and authoritarian and seemingly makes the prime minister beholden to the party bosses. I also inveighed

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against a 'system' that was subservient to tradition in a changing world, unmindful of social costs and performance in the name of a brand of 'socialism' discarded elsewhere. 'Socialism today,' I argued, 'seems more concerned with public ownership than a better life for Ram Singh, who should have the opportunity to rise to the top. Welfare must come from increased production and productivity, whereas Indian socialism is coming to mean more benefits for less work, and the grievously false notion that democracy prohibits discipline or firm action in the public interest.'

Past policy was not dogma that could defy the laws of growth and change. 'Nehru reduced to (an ideological) Nehruism would become the mumbo jumbo of dogmatists' whereas 'we have to own our responsibility and make our own opportunity.' Hence the need to break new ground. Poverty and population, our greatest problems, had to be confronted.

This called for an administrative revolution and the jettisoning of such throwbacks as the official insistence on the concurrent usage of the Saka calendar, which placed us in 1890. The proliferation of ministries to accommodate all and sundry had blurred the lines of command and affected coordination. Perhaps the appointment of certain senior ministers as overlords of given administrative clusters might help. Even otherwise, it would be useful to establish five advisory-cum-monitoring national councils for policy planning, economic affairs, security, science and social relations. Ministers often contributed little to collective Cabinet decision-making, as they were immersed in their portfolios and had only the vaguest sense of 'collective responsibility'. They had little time to read and digest Cabinet papers and needed sound personal assistance to carry out their larger Cabinet responsibilities as against a purely departmental role. Such assistance should, therefore, be provided.

The three immediate problems facing the new government would be formulating the budget and new import policy, finalising the Fourth Plan and fixing its size, and dealing with the continuing drought. I suggested tax simplification and rationalisation to curb evasion and black money, the largest repository of which was real estate, and counselled against the nationalisation of banking, general insurance, foreign trade and the wholesale trade in grains, which was apparently being advocated on ideological more than practical considerations. Likewise, economies of scale should not be precluded on the plea of curbing monopolies; and plant utilisation should not be restrained on the grounds of exceeding licensed capacity.

A recent report by the economist Dr R.K. Hazari found that distortions had crept into industrial licensing, and its overhaul had been

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recommended. I was for appointing a Lok Pal (national ombudsman), granting autonomy to AIR with commercial broadcasting and receiver licensing to buttress its revenues, electoral reform, smaller states with more active zonal councils and the promotion of tourism and public housing. I commented on the tension between secularism and revivalism, the problem of Muslim backwardness and discrimination against the community. I also dwelt on foreign and defence policy, including nuclear issues, and the restructuring of the North-east.

The paper stimulated discussion by challenging old assumptions and tossing new ideas into the ring. I gave copies of 'Mandate for Change' to several ministers, secretaries to the government, academics and others. Morarji Desai was later to tell L.K. Jha: 'I see Verghese is more than Indira's press secretary. But I like some of his ideas!' I had spoken to several individuals who could be used as sounding boards or a brains trust. These included K.N. Raj, K.R. Narayanan, Amartya Sen, Sukhomoy Chakravarty, P.N. Dhar, Lakshmi Jain, scientists, academics and officials. Most were personal friends and they, in turn, valued an informal conduit to the PM.

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By mid-January the country was in election mode, with the PM journeying non-stop across the land. Talks on the cow-slaughter issue and the Assam Hill State, however, continued. A Naga delegation under Khugato Sukhai met the PM and Dinesh Singh. While it spoke of sovereignty, the PM's response was: anything within the Indian Union. A regional federation was canvassed but an alternative Naga proposition suggesting a confederation limited to common links with regard to defence, external affairs and communications went nowhere.

The President, Dr Radhakrishnan, suffered a stroke in January. He could not take the salute at the Republic Day parade, but broadcast to the nation the previous evening, as always, and spoke sombrely of a 'revolution' if the government did not manage the economy better. Mrs G was peeved and remarked that advancing years and failing health had made the President somewhat pessimistic.

I knew well both President Radhakrishnan and his son, Gopal, Director of the Historical Division in the MEA, and had had ready access to Rashtrapati Bhavan while with *The Times*. The President would invariably receive those whom he knew informally in his bedroom, sprawled under coverlets in his large four-poster, with the bed and adjacent table strewn with books. He was a discreet source of information and avidly sought out the views of his visitors.

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As an Italian cultural scholar in Florence in 1950-51 (before we were married), Jamila had met Khushwant Singh, who was with an Indian UNESCO delegation, and had been invited to join it on a cultural tour of Italy. Later, on a Paris stopover en route home, she had met the delegation and was introduced to its leader, Dr Radhakrishnan, who inducted her as an honorary 'secretary'. She is not sure what she did, but recalls being plied with ice cream! Now, in Delhi, we would occasionally visit the President with our children and were most affectionately received.

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In J&K, as many as twenty-two candidates were declared elected unopposed as their opponents had been disqualified on various grounds. The PM was later informed by the chief minister, G.M. Sadiq, that Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, still sulking after being ousted under the Kamaraj Plan in 1964, had decided to sponsor a number of bogus candidates (who were under-aged, government contractors, and so on), knowing full well that their nominations would be rejected, thereby discrediting the polls on grounds of widespread rigging. True or not, Kashmir politics had been muddied.

Polling in the rest of the country took place between 15 and 21 February 1967. The conservative Swatantra Party, largely made up of former princes and those favouring free enterprise, was a new entrant with high hopes. Manual counting of ballots took several days to complete and there was high excitement outside newspaper offices, where vast crowds gathered in front of large screens. There were cheers and jeers as the results and trends were posted. The verdict was known by 9 p.m. on 26 February.

The Congress crawled to a bare majority of 274 seats in the Lok Sabha (the number rising to 280 a few days later) but had lost ground or been defeated in a number of state assemblies, where miscellaneous coalitions had managed to cobble together shaky majorities, as in Bihar (SSP-led), UP (Jana Sangh-led), Punjab, Rajasthan and Bengal. The Swatantra Party made it in Orissa, the Left Front in Kerala and the DMK in Madras. Many stalwarts had fallen, Kamaraj, Subramaniam, J.B. Kripalani, Sachin Chaudhuri and Manubhai Shah, among them. The Congress 'bosses' had taken a knock. Who would be elected the party's parliamentary leader? S.K. Patil was angling for support while Morarji projected himself, blaming the PM and the old guard for the discomfiture of the Congress. Kamaraj attributed the people's anger to the government's poor handling of the food situation and rising prices. The

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knives were out. The PM was depressed. The Jana Sangh had registered its presence.

Once again, there was pressure for a 'unanimous' election of the Congress leader in the expectation that this could allow room for a third compromise candidate. I did a series of short notes on immediate action points, setting up task forces to flesh out priority programmes, and candidate lists for the Cabinet, Rajya Sabha and gubernatorial appointments, bringing in new and younger blood.

Kamaraj wanted the PM to take Morarji as home minister and deputy PM. Her offer to him was 'an important portfolio' with number two rank. Morarji, however, formally threw his hat into the ring with a letter to all Congress MPs stating that the party needed strong leadership. A compromise was struck a day later with the PM accepting Morarji as finance minister and deputy prime minister on the clear understanding that this implied number two ranking and not a formal position. Morarji accepted, telling the PM that she was the leader and he a disciplined soldier, and there would be no question of forming groups. Yet the PM was convinced that Kamaraj was plugging for Sanjiva Reddy's inclusion in the Cabinet as the Syndicate's Trojan horse. Should she drop Sanjiva Reddy now or later? L.K. Jha counselled patience. I said she should go ahead and do it and have a Cabinet of her choice as there was nothing Kamaraj could do. Mrs G laughed and said, 'You've no political sense, George.' The next day, however, Dr Channa Reddy was taken in from Andhra as the minister for steel, mines and metals. Sanjiva Reddy became the Speaker.

There was an amusing aside to Triguna Sen's appointment as education minister. His name had earlier been vaguely suggested as a former Vice Chancellor of Vishvabharati and a 'good person'. Then, on a domestic flight when Cabinet possibilities were being discussed, the PM asked about 'that person from Shantiniketan'. Ultimately Triguna Sen's name was recalled. Where was he? Who knew something about him? None could shed much light. Later, a *Who's Who* was summoned and thumbed through, and Triguna Sen was tracked down to Banaras Hindu University. His record was reassuring. Thus are Cabinets made!

Many, such as L.K. Jha, felt that Morarji's entry into the Cabinet would strengthen the government. He had headed the Administrative Reforms Commission and, though blunt and rigid in many ways, was principled, and would be a counterweight to those in the party who favoured a lurch to the Left. Jha had served with Morarji and held him in high esteem. He recounted an amusing and not entirely apocryphal story about the new DPM's official visit to Ottawa where another bluff

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ICS officer, C.S. Venkatachar, was high commissioner. With business over early one evening, LK and Venkatachar persuaded Morarji to visit a night club with them on the ground that he would be strengthened in his instinctive rejection of that kind of indulgence, if founded on experience. Thus cajoled, the trio drove to a sedate establishment where, once seated, a hostess advanced to take an order for drinks. Morarji, a stern prohibitionist, said he did not drink. 'Ah, so you like your dames sober,' chirped the girl, attempting to clamber on to his lap. A horrified Morarji shook her off, remarking, 'I don't like dames,' whereupon the hostess stomped away exclaiming, 'You're no gentleman!' That ended the evening and Morarji returned home a wiser man.

The 1967 election was a watershed. The Congress' single-party dominance was challenged, especially in the states. Federalism took on new meaning as Centre-state differences could no longer be resolved within the family by reference to the Congress Working Committee or AICC. A new political vocabulary and norms of conduct came into vogue. Terms like gherao, bandh, hartal, zero hour, defection, aya Ram, gaya Ram, floor test, Rashtrapati Bhavan or Raj Bhavan 'parades', 'shouting brigade', booth capturing, Young Turks and SVD (Samyukta Vidhayak Dal) became part of the new lexicon.

The post-election period witnessed a bumpy political ride with defections in the states and unstable, short-lived coalitions punctuated with spells of President's Rule. The first of these, in Rajasthan, invited a no-confidence motion in Parliament on the grounds of central partisanship. There were quick changes in government and many an unholy partnership. There was much shaking of heads at the seeming loss of values and political morality. Politics was now less genteel and more raucous and muscular.

Amidst all of this, the sudden defection of Svetlana, Stalin's daughter, while on a visit to India caused a minor international sensation. It was a sad story that unfolded. When the dead Stalin was debunked at the Soviet 20th Congress, his daughter Svetlana found she had lost her friends and privileges until Khrushchev restored some of the latter. She had, meanwhile, fallen in love with Dinesh Singh's uncle Brajesh Singh, a Communist then living in Moscow. They wished to marry formally but the regime feared that this might enable her to get Indian citizenship and facilitate her exit from the country. Brajesh fell ill and, being recommended a warmer climate, planned to come to India. But Svetlana was not permitted to travel with him and so he remained in Moscow, where he died.

An embittered Svetlana was subsequently allowed to visit India to

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immerse her husband's ashes. She stayed with Dinesh in Delhi, then proceeded to Kalakankar, the family home, immersed the ashes in the Ganga and went on to become an Arya Samaji. She wished to remain in India, but Dinesh advised her to talk to the Soviet ambassador, Benedictov. She lunched with Benedictov on 7 March, but the ambassador rejected the idea of her remaining in India and, instead, handed back her passport with a ticket to Moscow.

Angered, she called a cab and drove to the nearby US Embassy, and sought asylum. US officials put her on a flight to New York but diverted her to Switzerland from Rome, fearing a breach in Soviet-US relations if she proceeded any further. She never sought asylum in India as she did not wish to embarrass either Dinesh or the Indian government. The full story was later told in Svetlana's autobiography. Ram Manohar Lohia raised the matter in Parliament in a bid to embarrass the government but found little purchase, and the issue gradually faded away.

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The process of filling other positions continued. The Swatantra Party, Praja Socialist Party and the Samyukta Socialist Party issued a joint statement naming Jayaprakash Narayan as a suitable presidential candidate. JP had always steadfastly declined any office ever since Nehru had invited him to become deputy prime minister, a decade earlier. He was now a servant in the cause of peace and national reconstruction, propagating the Gandhian ideals of sarvodaya and gramdan, and could not be persuaded to consider running for office. The PM did not wish to depart from the convention established after Rajendra Prasad, limiting the President to a single term in office, and hence favoured the then vice president, Dr Zakir Hussain. And so it was. The Opposition named Subba Rao, a former chief justice, as its candidate, but to no avail.

The new clutch of appointments found L.K. Jha slated to become the Reserve Bank governor, with P.N. Haksar replacing him as secretary to the PM. Haksar, a relative and family friend of the Nehrus, was a barrister who had joined the new Indian Foreign Service and had been the MEA spokesman some years earlier. He had a fine mind and was warm and friendly. Also, the PM trusted him. B.K. Nehru had earlier been suggested for the post and would have filled the bill. But the PM felt there would be a howl of protest if she named a relative for the job. Further, BK was seen as tilting to the West and to private enterprise.

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Haksar's leanings were the other way. As a pragmatic leftist, he seemed the safer bet.

Haksar's appointment was welcome, but LK would be missed. He had been very supportive of my unorthodox commentaries. He had been willing to share and discuss ideas and to back my views if he concurred. Indeed, it was the Cabinet Secretary, D.S. Joshi, another friendly official, who called me early in April and said he hoped I would not misunderstand, but whatever ideas I had should first be discussed with the respective departmental heads before being passed on to the PM. It would be awkward if something the PM said was subsequently shot down or if she spoke out before a proposal could be 'formally crystallised and was ripe for action'. He referred to an undercurrent of feeling about this matter but did not elaborate.

My policy notes and 'Mandate for Change' had probably attracted ire in some quarters. I agreed that I should be more consultative and Joshi was kind enough to say that he himself was always available. I did consult more after that, but little really changed and Haksar was no less responsive to my notes and ideas. The PM never once objected to anything but seldom disclosed what was in her mind.

The party was riven by dissension between its organisational and governmental wings and its Left and Right factions. The PM wanted to move Left, which she believed to be the natural ideological position for the government of a developing country to gravitate towards. Hence talk of nationalisation and state trading. Dinesh felt that a party split would possibly clear the air and facilitate such a repositioning. My reasoning was that performance mattered, not ideology. In the event, Zakir Hussain's election as President strengthened the PM's hand. But many issues awaited attention.

To counter rising prices, it was proposed to set up consumer stores through cooperatives, or otherwise eliminate middlemen in order to pass on larger margins to the producer and consumer. Lakshmi Jain accordingly set up the first Super Bazar in Delhi in late 1966.

The economic scene gave cause for worry. The food situation was alarming with continuing drought, though the aid consortium had pledged 10 million tonnes of grain and $1500 million in project and non-project assistance. The World Bank's Bell Mission to review the Indian economy as a prelude to determining an aid package had gone further, insisting on a range of policy changes with higher priority for food and agriculture, fertilisers, family planning, fuller utilisation of industrial capacity, import liberalisation, decontrol and a greater role for private foreign investment. It wanted the Fourth Plan to be stretched to six

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years, was critical of defence outlays and urged an accommodation with Pakistan.

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Reports from Bihar were cause for deep concern. There was a political and administrative breakdown, mounting indiscipline and loss of morale. Famine stalked the land. It suddenly dawned on me that, maybe, I should go to Bihar, join the relief work and move around with Jayaprakash Narayan, now heading the National Bihar Relief Committee. That personal exposure might suggest the way forward. The PM was delighted and JP most welcoming.

I entrained for Patna on 6 June, even as news broke about the Arab-Israeli war following Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The Bihar Relief Committee (BRC) had four departments dealing with food, health, engineering (wells and local works) and administration. It had distributed the volunteers pouring in from all parts of the country among these sectors, according to their skills and preferences. JP suggested that there was little direct relief work I could do 'at my level' and that it would be best if I travelled and looked around, acted as the PM's eyes and ears, reported back to her and liaised with the BRC. He was sorely disappointed with the administrative system and its slow response.

I hit the road, visiting remote villages in the worst-affected districts and looking at the whole range of programmes: drinking water schemes, the repair and desilting of tanks and traditional irrigation and drainage works, the digging of shallow wells and drilling of deeper tubewells in alluvial and hard rock areas. I evaluated the food-for-work or the so-called 'hard manual work' schemes, khadi, handloom and craft centres offering employment that would generate income and purchasing power, the public distribution system, school feeding and the free kitchen or sasti roti programmes and cattle feeding centres.

The situation was depressing yet inspiring. A camaraderie of distress had overcome caste and income barriers, and it was heartening to see the dedication and devotion of the NGOs and volunteers, Indian and foreign, who had left comfortable homes and offices to brave the blistering summer and help, wherever and in whatever way they could. The BRC had extended its reach to parts of UP, Bengal and Orissa, and its schemes were orchestrated by JP, who was tireless in averting what might otherwise have been a human catastrophe. The indignity, discrimination and exploitation I saw beggared belief. After seeing green, irrigated fields in the Kosi command, the plenitude of groundwater easily tapped at shallow depths and the wholly iniquitous land system, I was convinced that this was truly a manmade disaster.

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I visited the plateau region and spent time with the Palamau district collector, Kumar Suresh Singh, who did outstanding work, especially among the tribals. Like me, he saw famine as a catalytic agency in development and social change. There were reports of conversion (not necessarily forced), but also evidence of admiration for the devoted work of church-related and missionary organisations. I made tour notes with recommendations and passed them on to JP, who sent them to the state's development commissioner and to his BRC field organisers, for information and action where necessary.

I had occasion to travel with JP to Pusa near Muzaffarpur in Bihar, to meet Vinoba Bhave. I found him somewhat frail and hard of hearing but wiry, sharp of mind and possessed of an impish humour. He was anecdotal and spoke in parables. He had preached bhoodan in Telengana in 1946-48 and appealed to large landowners to gift part of their estates to the landless. Now he was seeking donations of entire hamlets and said some 3000 villages in Darbhanga Division had been given in gramdan.

'What next?' I asked.

'I'm a Brahmin,' he replied. 'My job is to bring people together in marriage.' He believed bhoodan, graduating to gramdan and finally deshdan, would bring about a revolutionary change in social relations. It was a 'defence measure' that would end violence and prevent a 'China from within', a reference to the anarchic and brutal Cultural Revolution in that country. He was critical of the education system and extolled the Chinese 'half-half schools' that predicated three hours of study followed by three hours of work. In his view, work would put an end to student indiscipline. The famine was a warning but also a blessing as it had promoted national integration. He was for planning from below but not opposed to science or machines. Science and spirituality must go together.

I asked how long it would take for gramdan to change social relations. Baba replied: 'Growing vegetables takes three months and once you eat them nothing is left. But if you plant a mango, it takes three to four years to grow, but then it lasts.' I inquired why he did not broadcast to spread his message. He replied that he believed in 'narrow-casting', and hence tramped through the villages of India.

Later, during his discussion with JP, Vinoba said that it would be foolish on the part of the state government to abolish land revenue as proposed. Instead, the proceeds should go to develop gramdan villages. JP's view was that the government should be persuaded to vest lands with panchayats and allow them to collect rents. The underlying theory was that if 75 per cent of the population of a village owning 51 per cent

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of the land declared gramdan, this should be formally recorded. Thereafter, all farm lands in the village and related administrative powers should be vested in the panchayat through the gram sabha which should be empowered to collect rents. The original owners should retain ownership and be permitted to cultivate and bequeath their pledged lands, though not sell them. They must, however, give a twentieth of their land, a fortieth of its produce and a thirtieth of all non-land income to the community. The landless would be required to put in twelve days free labour, annually, for community work.

My findings and recommendations on Bihar were written up on my return to Delhi* on 1 July and read by policy makers, practitioners in disaster management, donor agencies, diplomats and others as it was holistic, descriptive and prescriptive. The PM and Haksar were very pleased, as was JP. (See Appendix 1)

Forty years on, little has changed in Bihar. Hopefully, there are some signs of new beginnings under the present chief minister, Nitish Kumar.

As a postscript to the Bihar famine, I sent a note to the PM suggesting that JP merited the 'highest honour' the country could confer, for his organisation of the BRC as well as for other public services rendered over many years. I had the Bharat Ratna in mind. Nothing happened.

The Green Revolution, the foundations of which were laid by C. Subramaniam as agriculture minister, B. Sivaraman as secretary, food and agriculture, and Dr M.S. Swaminathan, as the country's foremost agricultural scientist, had begun to show results. But a failure to implement agrarian reform effectively continues to be what Daniel Thorner, a most thoughtful observer of Indian agriculture described as a 'built-in depressor' in relation to agricultural production and prosperity.

*

The Communist Party had split in 1964 and the more radical pro-Chinese CPM splintered in 1967 under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar, who launched a peasant-led people's revolutionary movement from Naxalbari. The Chinese approvingly described this as a clap of 'spring thunder'. Naxalism, inspired by Che Guevera and Mao, had come to India.

Internal dissensions in the party and defections in the states put pressure on the Congress to initiate dramatic policy shifts, as the government found itself facing a clutch of problems.

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*It was published by the Super Bazar under the auspices of the BRC. See *Beyond the Famine: An Approach to Regional Planning for Bihar* (Delhi: SuperBazar, 1967).

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There was considerable anxiety over the bloody riots that broke out over Urdu in Ranchi. It had caused heavy Muslim casualties and a shutting down of the Heavy Engineering Corporation. Altogether, the internal and external renewal we sought was not in sight. I felt depressed by the tenor and trend of events, a sentiment shared by many of my friends. Meanwhile, feelers had started coming about the possibility of a return to journalism, but I held out. It was too early to quit.

There was a crisis on May Day, 1967, when the station director of AIR, Calcutta, P.C. Chatterji (later DG, AIR) barred the West Bengal CPI labour minister from airing his Labour Day broadcast, as he found certain passages objectionable. The minister called for a change in the political system and criticised the judiciary as a lackey of the Congress. There was quite a rumpus, and the AIR code was duly revised. The incident triggered reawakened interest in the Chanda Committee's plea for broadcast autonomy, which had been desultorily debated for months, with some pleading lack of financial viability and others arguing that it must remain under government control. This was still a 'socialist' era. Commercial broadcasting, however, had been introduced after Radio Ceylon commenced a popular Listeners' Request music programme, sponsored by advertisers. This was diverting Indian listeners from AIR and so something had to be done to prevent further erosion. Vividh Bharati was born.

Television first came to India experimentally with UNESCO funding in 1959. Emerging satellite technology excited interest. It appeared to open up new frontiers for audio-visual communication as an aid to development and national integration, overcoming literacy and connectivity barriers.

The idea found influential support from Indian space scientists led by Vikram Sarabhai. In fact, there was a time when some even argued that national television could do more for India than nuclear weapons! A conservative information and broadcasting ministry was nervous about being elbowed out by ISRO as Sarabhai started a pilot Krishi Darshan (farm) programme (which the PM inaugurated on 26 January 1967) by distributing community viewing sets (fed through a terrestrial network) in a hundred villages around Delhi. This was to be a prelude to a more ambitious satellite programme initially through a borrowed satellite and, subsequently, through ISRO's own synchronous satellites. I worked closely with Sarabhai and his colleagues to prepare and canvass a number of papers conceptualising a national TV network.

At the time of the 1967 general elections, I had made out a case for election broadcasts over AIR (then barred as AIR was seen as a

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government organ) on the ground that its listeners far outnumbered newspaper subscribers. I pointed out that this prohibition had not merely curbed voter education but had added greatly to election costs, by barring a most valuable and cost-effective means of communication with an extraordinary reach. This was all the more reason to confer autonomy on AIR.

I was equally concerned with certain illiberal tendencies impinging on freedom of expression. In 1966 the Maharashtra government had banned a play by Partap Sharma, *A Touch of Brightness*, while Volume II of *The History of India* by Percival Spear had been seized by Customs. I drew attention to these incidents and sought guidelines for the future.

The PM told the International Press Institute in Delhi that newspapers should exercise voluntary restraint as sensational reporting had invariably fanned trouble. Later that year, the Punjab administration imposed censorship on sixteen provincial papers in a bid to cool the Punjab agitation and prevent publication of incendiary statements by agitators. The matter of newspaper, book and film censorship was taken up by the Committee of Secretaries where L.K. Jha argued my case for a more tolerant view and for an advisory board to act as a filter.

More disturbing was a move to expel Rawle Knox, who had been writing for *The Daily Telegraph* and *Observer* of London, for being critical about electoral rigging in Kashmir, the misuse of Emergency powers, student hooliganism and the tendency to resort, all too readily, to police firing. He had done no more than hold up a mirror to India. Expulsion would be an extreme step that would win no laurels, especially in the absence of efforts to talk to him or his editor. Here again, LK supported me and the intervention did help cool matters.

Some months later, David Van Praagh of *The Toronto Globe and Mail* was told that his visa was not being renewed. There was another stink before a six-month extension was granted. This was a very short-sighted policy and totally counterproductive.

The question of how India looked at and was looked upon by the world had been a matter of discussion in official circles, especially after the 1962 and 1965 wars and the economic crisis at the time. I was asked to head a committee consisting of the heads of the government's internal and external information and publicity departments and make appropriate recommendations. Our report, 'The Indian Image' argued that:

> Publicity, like goodwill, is an intangible asset whose gains will far outweigh the costs involved . . . There has to be a high level and well integrated information policy which is lacking at

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present. A free flow of information is part of the very life breath of an open society and undue sensitivity should not lead us to resort to open or veiled forms of restrictions, censorship or news management. We have to harness the revolution in mass communications to tell the world how India lives and thinks and what it is doing. There is a tremendous story to tell and there is a worldwide audience waiting to be told it.

*

If the Indian image mattered, the country's defence posture equally called for close attention, and it seemed logical that the focus should be on specific issues within a larger policy perspective. I, accordingly, did a paper entitled 'Security and Strategy' and sent it through Haksar to the PM, with the suggestion that a copy be sent to the defence minister as well. There was little integration between foreign policy and defence and, in fact, the former had become subservient to the latter. We did not have a clear world view, or security doctrine. We surely could not afford to accept the proposition that war with Pakistan and/or China was inevitable and that our security could not be enhanced by diplomacy

The size of the standing army (825,000 men) could be reduced by improved mobility and fire power, the adoption of an offensive-defensive military doctrine, and by abandoning the mistaken theory of 'not (yielding) an inch of territory', a hangover from 1962. Costs could be further cut by the improved management of defence.

We also had to be prepared to deal with unconventional and irregular forces and possible nuclear attack. It would be a better option to sign the NPT, with such amendments as we might be able to secure, and then proceed to develop bomb/missile technology without 'weaponisation'. Meanwhile, a nuclear guarantee would be useless and we would be better advised to depend on the US and USSR to intervene on our behalf in their own interest.

The security frontiers of India extend beyond our territorial frontiers—along the Himalayan rim lands, Burma and the Indian Ocean. The defence of the North-east poses special problems. So there was a need for closer coordination between foreign policy and defence; the establishment of a National Security Council, appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff and high-level committees to review the management of defence and defence production, and of intelligence, respectively. Subsequently, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was created to undertake external intelligence and was hived off from the Intelligence Bureau, which would concern itself exclusively with internal intelligence.

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FIRST DRAFT

The NPT was now in the closing stages of negotiation, and time was running out. India had to decide fast whether to sign. Our unwillingness to sign was because: India required security guarantees against China, and felt that there must be a balance of obligations between nuclear and non-nuclear powers (both of which were lacking); and the onerous safeguards clause applied only to non-nuclear powers and could even retard their developing nuclear capability for peaceful, civil purposes. On the other hand, not signing the treaty was likely to imply a future intent to build nuclear weapons, any statement to the contrary notwithstanding.

The best line of action would, therefore, be to negotiate improvements in the treaty, especially with regard to the safeguards clause. We should then sign the NPT, limiting our adherence to a five- to seven-year period within which we could expect the nuclear powers to take tangible steps towards nuclear disarmament. Acceptance of the treaty by France and China—non-signatories to the NPT—within that period would also have to be stipulated. Such a stance would not deny us access to safeguarded technology or aid critical to our development, while our own nuclear technology and industrial capability would advance during that period.

Around the same time, a team from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of California made a presentation to the Planning Commission about the possibility of building large agro-industrial nuclear energy centres of 1000-3000 MW capacity to pump or desalinate and develop 'food factories' or 'high-productivity farms' along with fertiliser factories, or energy-intensive industries like aluminium smelters, marine chemicals and so on.

Homi Sethna of AEC said that the Tatas planned a marine chemical-cum-fertiliser park in Saurashtra. Vikram Sarabhai subsequently pursued the possibility of establishing a nuclear power based agro-industrial complex along the Ganga near Narora in UP.

We also needed to formulate more finessed policies towards Pakistan and Burma. There was everything to be gained by having discussions with Pakistan on Kashmir. On the other hand, East Pakistan's resentment against dominance by the western wing was becoming increasingly evident and Dacca would benefit greatly from an agreement with India for the mutually beneficial development of the Ganga-Brahmaputra system. The Burmese were also becoming wary of China, and we could gain from cooperation with them in ensuring more effective border management, and an outlet to the sea via Akyab (Sitwe).

The year closed with the release of Sheikh Abdullah and the passage

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of the Language Bill, making English a permanent Associate Official Language along with Hindi. This cooled linguistic passions that were running high, even though anti-Hindi demonstrations continued in Madras and Bangalore. The DMK, which had won a landslide victory in the 1967 elections, was reassured by the language amendment. The passage of the Central Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act enabled Annadurai to renounce the party's secessionist platform, with which he had not been too comfortable.

The New Year (1968) opened with an AICC session in Hyderabad, where Kamaraj handed over the reins as Congress president to Nijalingappa, former chief minister of Karnataka. Rumbles could be heard from Congressmen and friends and colleagues. It marked the beginning of their disenchantment with Mrs G's ways, and her reliance on an inner coterie of advisers. Romesh Thapar, Asoka Mehta, T.T. Krishnamachari and V.K.R.V. Rao had drifted away. JP organised a convention in Delhi on national unity, secularism, language and governance at which some speakers made out a case for a presidential system of government and smaller states.

The PM, meanwhile, was greatly buoyed by the engagement of her elder son, Rajiv, to Sonia Maino, an Italian student of English at Cambridge, where they had met. Rajiv, shy and reserved, sought to elude the media and did not wish to be photographed. Mrs G handled her New Year press conference with aplomb and when asked whether she planned a holiday, replied, 'A holiday is a state of mind and I'm having one now!'

*

Many interlocutors had met Sheikh Abdullah to draw him out. The task of evolving a basis for a further dialogue was given to G. Parthasarathi, who had served as India's representative in the United Nations. There was some discussion about the degree of autonomy that might be sought and offered. The Sheikh was prepared to accept the three original heads of accession plus those parts of the Delhi Agreement he had negotiated. He also canvassed the idea of a 'soft frontier' between the two parts of J&K. GP agreed that a soft frontier would be worth looking at, but a bit later. There were still deep suspicions about Pakistan's motives and in dealing with it.

One aspect of this was to be seen in the unhurried manner in which we approached the implementation of the Nehru-Noon Agreement of 1958, on border adjustments. A particularly disgraceful example of this was our refusal to give up Southern Berubari as agreed, after having

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absorbed the Pakistani territory to be exchanged in lieu thereof. Some elements in West Bengal had taken the matter to court as a constitutionally-violative cession of territory, and there the matter lodged for years without any great anxiety to expedite a ruling and final settlement. (Later the Supreme Court ruled that these exchanges amounted to a final settlement of the unsettled Radcliffe boundary and was not a cession of territory.)

Meanwhile, India persuaded Pakistan to accept a corridor through Tin Bigha in West Bengal to its enclaves at Dahagram and Agorapota in lieu of Berubari. Despite this being endorsed under the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972, it took another two decades for India to grant that corridor and that too only during daylight hours, when all it required was a single flyover or underpass to be constructed over a distance no larger than a football field.

The lackadaisical pursuit, since Independence, of India's historic right to navigation along the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Barak (Meghna) between West Bengal and the North-east and a passage to the sea from Tripura to Chittagong was also extremely surprising. Indeed, an Indo-Pakistan transit agreement had actually been reached in 1960. This provided for Pakistan to run rakes of twenty wagons and two coaches daily between Ishurdi in East Pakistan and Lahore while India would be able to operate services from Calcutta to Amingaon (Guwahati), Silchar and Akhaura-Agartala/Hilli. Pakistan's request for an Ishurdi-Hyderabad (Sind) service was to be considered later.

Pakistan ratified the agreement in 1961 but the arrangement fell through on account of Indian objections on the specious ground that this would confer a major advantage on Pakistan at considerable security risk to India. A great opportunity was thus thrown away without any understanding of the geo-political costs and benefits involved. We have been importuning Bangladesh for transit ever since.

*

I found the Government of India's poor understanding of the needs and aspirations of the North-east and the absence of a larger geo-strategic vision of its extended external neighbourhood disturbing and felt that it was necessary to fill the gap. Events in Tibet, Northern Burma, North-east Thailand and Indo-China were taking a disquieting turn with insurgency, civil war, warlordism, Chinese infiltration, gun running and the growing machinations of drug syndicates, operating out of the Golden Triangle and within the deep mountain and jungle recesses of the upper Brahmaputra, Mekong and Yangtze. These impinged on the

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North-east in ways that we needed to monitor and understand. At the same time, tensions in Assam were coming to a boil and new demands were beginning to surface. In the circumstances, I felt that rather than keep running round in circles in Delhi, I might more usefully employ myself on behalf of the government by travelling to the North-east to better understand what was happening and formulate an approach to what we might do in that critical region.

Haksar thought this was an excellent idea and the PM readily agreed. I drew up an extensive forty-day tour plan and intimated key officials, agencies and institutions. My first stop was Calcutta, where I had a long meeting with the Eastern Army commander, then Lieutenant General Sam Manekshaw. He endorsed my integrated approach but had little time for anthropological niceties and wanted firm administration by well-selected and dedicated 'non-vegetarians' and 'non prohibitionists' who could mingle with the tribes and not prudishly isolate them or treat them as museum pieces. He thought outsiders should be allowed to purchase property and settle in the area. Also, there was need for strong Central direction in the region. The threat from China in NEFA was limited; we were strong in Sikkim. But a Chinese threat was developing in North Burma and could become more serious over time. East Pakistan was vulnerable and so the Chinese aimed to weaken us by stirring disaffection.

Vote bank politics was creating tribal divides. In Mizoram the insurgency continued from sanctuaries in East Pakistan, but the grouping of villages—bringing small hamlets together in more viable roadside units—though originally resented had worked well, and sections of the Mizo National Front appeared willing to come to a settlement. The Naga insurgents would be tougher to crack, as they had developed a parallel underground administration in certain places, and were sending cadres to China for training.

In Tripura the refugee influx from East Pakistan had altered the demographic balance and made the assorted tribes a minority in their homeland. It had also entailed the occupation of the fertile plains fringe by these settlers, confining the tribal population to the less developed and poorly connected hills. The promise of refugee relief was inadvertently attracting more refugees and, even if they did come, some way had to be found to settle them elsewhere and to provide all bona fide citizens with identity cards. I believed that Tripura, an ancient princely state like Manipur, should be made a full-fledged state and a federating member of what should be an Eastern Frontier States Union. I toured both the Tripura plains and hills, visiting rehabilitation sites

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and rubber plantations and listening to different groups. The tribal-Bengali gulf was clearly evident and widening.

On to Silchar. Then to Aizawl in the Mizo Hills District, and Demagiri on the Karnaphuli River, the inland waterway through the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to Chittagong. This waterway was severed with the construction, by Pakistan, of the Kaptai Dam. A poor compensation and resettlement and rehabilitation package resulted in 45,000 displaced Chakmas migrating to Tripura in 1964, from where they were relocated in Arunachal. This was to give birth to the Chakma uprising in the CHT and to an agitation in Arunachal against the relocation of these 'outsiders' there.

The journey continued through Manipur, Nagaland and Upper Assam where I could spend time with ONGC officials and was briefed on the remarkable air supply operations carried out by the IAF. So on to NEFA, still India's Last Frontier.

The crowded Ziro Valley, an alpine bowl at 5000 feet, is inhabited by the Apa Tani who practise a remarkable form of ecological living. At Reru village, I was invited to the men's platform, ate boiled eggs, and drank *apong* and heard a bluff *gam bura* or village elder, Padi Laylang, relate with pride how Nehru had come visiting in 1952 with Indira Gandhi. He laughed as he recalled offering Nehru a handsome bride price of several head of *mithun* for his daughter who, being educated, could help him with accounts, a task beyond his twelve illiterate wives!

Throughout the region the Border Roads Organisation was at work, doing a wonderful job connecting India to a hidden past, a fragment of its being and history, and the North-east of the future.

From NEFA I went to Shillong and had a long meeting with the governor, Vishnu Sahay, who was unhappy about the disbandment of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service. He saw NEFA graduating to Union Territory status but wondered it if should remain a single unit.

K.A.A. Raja arranged for me to meet all the senior officials at the NEFA Secretariat. Discontent was writ large about the unjust treatment meted out to the Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) cadre despite the very commendable job they had so cheerfully done, in difficult and dangerous circumstances. I too felt that virtual disbandment of a proven administrative cadre, well suited to the people and terrain in those long 'excluded' frontier regions, was a grave error. I pursued the matter in Delhi later, but the ICS-IAS mandarins resented encroachment into what they thought was their turf. India has lived to regret that folly.

A long meeting with the Assam chief minister, Chaliha, revealed a

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fine man with a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of the tribal question than most. He felt we were sitting on a volcano and favoured 'administrative integration with regional autonomy' for both the Hills and Plains. I talked to a number of Khasi leaders before driving to Cherrapunji and down the escarpment through plantations of citrus, arecanut, coffee and cashew, to the Pakistan border. The rolling countryside had been bared and eroded on account of a shrinking jhum cycle. The waterfalls had gone dry, but would roar to life framed in a mist of spray and moss, given a thundershower, or when the monsoon broke with relentless fury.

Back in Delhi, I sat down to compose a detailed report on the North-east, entitled, 'East India Mosaic', setting out the ethnic background that provided a capsuled history of the region. One paper covered the 'eastern insurgency' in Nagaland, Manipur and the Mizo Hills. I stated that there were no military solutions and the basis of policy had to be a firm but fair civil administration with local involvement and village defence forces. The government must have a holistic strategy embracing not just security but interlocking political, economic, sociological and diplomatic issues and encompassing relations with Pakistan and Burma.

What was needed was the establishment of a regional planning board for the formulation and execution of a regional plan into which state/unit plans could dovetail. In view of small unit sizes and the need to secure economies of scale, common regional corporations for transport, marketing, civil supplies, plantation development, handicrafts and tourism with sub-units to service local needs would be a feasible option.

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A North-east Development Bank and a North-east Industrial Development Corporation could promote industrialisation of the region based on its natural resources and requirements including the production of non-ordnance stores required by the security forces. In view of the mountainous topography and the presence of mighty rivers, there was a strong case for a non-scheduled North-eastern airlines freighter-cum-air taxi service as a feeder to Indian Airlines, with a hub within the region that could also take over part or all of the air supply and maintenance role in NEFA and other remote regions. In all of this it was necessary to have a twenty-five-year perspective and then work backwards to achieve the goal, step by step.

Other papers followed. I noted the settlement pattern of small hamlets perched on ridges, which offered security and better health in contrast

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to the dank, malarial valleys below. Yet jhum cultivation had led to deforestation and erosion and hilltop settlements entailed tenuous communications and corresponding difficulties of access to markets and educational, health and other services and, especially, water supply in the dry season.

Building roads and the upgrading of technology would require more manpower than available. The answer was the voluntary (not forced) grouping or clustering of villages near roads. This would make for easier access and render it possible to deliver services more economically and ensure better administration. The establishment of experimental clusters with incentives could demonstrate the manifold advantages of such settlements, as had happened at Nampong and Tezu in the Tirap and Luhit divisions, respectively, and thereby further the policy objective of voluntary grouping as an aid to better administration, development and security.

Since the local people wanted roads, schools, water supply and health services, the administration could offer assistance for such programmes, provided that the outside labour necessary for the purpose was entitled to some homestead land and subsequent employment in the development of horticulture, floriculture or whatever, without transfer of land ownership. The local population could be made major stakeholders in such ventures, with cooperative or corporate management and responsibility for input supply, extension, post-harvest storage, processing, branding and marketing on a profit-sharing basis.

This was an extremely sensitive topic as reactions to subsequent Chakma and Tibetan settlement indicated. But properly managed, with complete transparency and local community participation and supervisory control, it would be an experiment worth trying. In fact, some ex-servicemen had been settled in the Vijaynagar area at the easternmost tip of Tirap to prevent infiltration by hostile elements through Burma. All such settlers and outside labour could be placed in one or two non-territorial constituencies, so as to prevent them from tilting the electoral balance in the manner that tea garden workers have done in Assam.

The border roads policy in NEFA had ordained that no roads and airfields should be constructed within thirty miles of the international boundary, on security considerations. This meant excluding places of significance like Walong, Mechuka, Tuting and, in some degree, even Tawang, which was only connected by an ill-maintained, pre-1962 road. I thought this was a most short-sighted policy. The northern reaches of NEFA had traditionally had close cultural and commercial ties with

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Tibet. And these were the areas where our administration had reached only recently and had been overrun by China in 1962.

A stronger administrative presence, development and national integration were, therefore, particularly important. In a brief for the PM, I said: 'A disgruntled population that is made to feel non-Indian and expendable can, by itself, create a security problem. This, rather than the notion of Chinese divisions pouring down from the McMahon Line is the real and major threat.' This resulted in some small policy changes.

Since many issues touched on border policy and relations with Burma, the PM asked for a note on the points for discussion with the Burmese leader, General Ne Win, who was due to visit Delhi in a few days. I prepared a brief, stressing the need for close collaboration in military operations and border management with our neighbour, especially in view of the free trans-border movement permitted to tribal groups on either side; and an outlet to the sea via Akyab, down the Kaladan River. Ne Win thought border movement regulation could be examined in detail. Joint military operations might cause a public outcry but civil-police liaison and an annual border conference would be in order. We forgot to pursue the matter of the Mizoram-Akyab highway for thirty-five years after which the Kaladan Corridor proposal was revived and is now being implemented.

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Preparations for the PM's Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand tour once again showed up lack of a South-east Asian or Indian Ocean policy. Padmaja Naidu was called in to assist with speech-writing. This only added to the general confusion with a lot of pointless chopping and changing to little purpose. In Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew was impressive and confident, but the PM had nothing to say on regional cooperation, or the consequences of any emerging security vacuum. The Australia and New Zealand visits were pleasant but the PM complained that she was always being served chicken when she much preferred ham and pork!

The Malaysia visit was reserved for the journey back and, at its conclusion, the PM had a consultation with our South-east Asian envoys. This was a time of transition. The US was showing fatigue in Indo-China and there was a fear of rising Communist influence, especially in Thailand. A South-east Asian regional grouping offered hope and comfort, but Indonesia was not for India being associated with it as it had its own ambitions. One result of the PM's tour was that a door had been opened and contact established on which to build.

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On the PM's return to Delhi there was word of a stalemate over the sharing of the Ganga waters below Farakka. We had kept asking Pakistan to justify its demands on the Ganga, instead of determining a fair share of the water to which East Pakistan was entitled. Pakistan's demands kept rising. Now, with India embarking on the construction of the Farakka Barrage to resuscitate the Bhagirathi-Hooghly to save Calcutta Port and prevent saline intrusion, Pakistan sought UN or third party intervention. Wherever one looked, there was a sense of drift and general frustration, in official and political quarters, at the lack of leadership.

I took a month's leave to go down to Kerala. While I was away, the UN adopted the NPT by a large margin, with over ninety members in favour, twenty abstentions and four votes against it (including India's). India had long made its position known, but some of our scientists were not sure that we had adequately considered the possible technological fallout.

*

I had, over the past several months, been receiving offers from *The Times of India, The Statesman* and other papers and had been sounded on becoming the defence PRO or head of external publicity. I declined these, but showed interest when Mulgaonkar approached me, on behalf of the Birlas, to succeed him as chief editor of *The Hindustan Times*.

By then, I had had my fill of government and was increasingly disenchanted by my role or effectiveness in a situation of indecision and drift. I lunched with G.D. Birla who arranged for me to meet K.K. Birla, chairman of the *HT* Board.

The first question I asked KK was what was to happen to Ajit Bhattacharjea who had been brought in as number two from Washington, swapping places with Krishan Bhatia, both old friends. He said that neither was in the running and that I should therefore not feel I was easing them out. He then said that he would like to have me only if Mrs Gandhi was willing to let me go, as he had no wish to embarrass her in any way. I said that I had told the PM at the very start that I would like to return to my profession after two to three years, and that the time had come. I would, of course, speak to her. We then discussed the paper's policy. Mr Birla said that the policy of *HT* had traditionally been nationalist and centrist, or a little right of centre. I said I would have no problem with a pragmatic centrist stance that allowed for a mixed economy and an independent foreign policy. KK found that acceptable.

I met the PM and told her my time in government was drawing to a close and I desired to return to my profession. *HT* had made an offer which I would like to accept, but would stay on until alternative

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arrangements were made. I added that KK wished me to leave with her goodwill.

'Oh, you have my goodwill wherever you go,' she replied graciously. Then, 'I suppose it's good to have a change.' And finally, 'Let me think about it.' She seemed sorry and surprised.

I called Birla and requested him to inform Ajit Bhattacharjea. He did so, and Ajit later called back and said he understood but might find it difficult to stay, and would rather go abroad, or seek other pastures. There was no rancour.

*

Mid-August saw Soviet and other Eastern European armies invade and occupy Czechoslovakia, deposing Premier Dubcek. The PM disapproved of the Soviet action but baulked at condemning it. Asoka Mehta and Sucheta Kripalani voted with the Opposition. Asoka resigned from the government that evening. The Soviets were quite brusque in telling us to keep off their turf.

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The Assam Reorganisation and NE Regional Council formula was finally announced and received a cautious welcome. This made what was to become Meghalaya an autonomous unit, with law and order controlled by Assam. This seemed no more than a stop-gap arrangement. Separation was soon demanded.

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In the little time left to me, I decided to put together some thoughts on the development of the immense potential of the eastern rivers through regional cooperation. These ideas had been maturing in my mind over the years but gained wider meaning and urgency after the Bihar famine and the seeming futility of our talks with Pakistan and Nepal on harnessing the bounty of the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Barak/Megna for mutual benefit. Further, I saw a close nexus between the resolution of the eastern rivers question in collaboration with East Pakistan and the future of India's North-east. I also saw this as an instrument in our diplomacy with and between the two wings of Pakistan. With the Farakka still a technical and engineering issue pending its scheduled completion in 1971-72, I saw good reason to resolve it at this level within a wider framework of cooperation rather than delay matters beyond 1972, when the Farakka would become operational and be

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treated as a political issue, introducing a wholly new dimension to the debate.

In view of the many dimensions and complexities involved, I suggested an inter-ministerial/inter-disciplinary task force to examine the matter. The sharing of the Teesta, on which both sides were planning irrigation projects, flood moderation and forecasting, navigation, ground-water exploitation, power generation and basin transfers, required study. It also required bringing in Nepal and examining possibilities of augmentation of lean season flows from Himalayan storages (through regulated releases) and regional power transfers. The prospects were exciting, and the paper aroused considerable interest within the PMO, MEA and the then irrigation and power ministry.

Some months earlier, Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish economist, who later received the Nobel Prize, published his monumental *Asian Drama: An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations*. He had castigated Indian planning, lamented India's 'arrested social development' and categorised the country as a 'soft state'. In twenty years since Independence and despite its head start and many things going for it, India had begun to fall behind others in East and South-east Asia. This was something to ponder even as we counted the positives.

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While the PM was away on an extended South American tour, I sent Haksar a note to be passed on to the PM, to assist her in making up her mind about reorganising the information wing of the PMO and deciding on the role of my successor. I reproduce part of my note, 'The Post of Information Adviser', as it remains valid even today:

> Information is an integral part of decision-making. However, in a democratic system, people are or should be partners in governance and enjoy a sense of participation and involvement. Information cannot be a closed preserve ... The information limbs of GOI should therefore be associated with the process of decision making and ... fully aware of the background and intent/consequences of current decisions ... The information man also has a role in the public presentation of decisions in a context and language that is most conducive to understanding among different segments of the population and through different media.
>
> GOI, however, has never had such an information policy. Information is still considered something that should be given

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out in controlled doses after the event and its critical role in preparing the ground for decision making has been imperfectly understood and applied.

The I&B Ministry is perhaps the least 'informed' in GOI. Secretary I&B's very legitimate case to be included in the various committees of Secretaries ex-officio and to be posted with all policy papers has been repeatedly turned down . . .

Speech writing has also been inhibited by the absence of a strong commitment to clearly defined programmes. This also applies to the Round Table proceedings . . .

PM has not been keen on regular press conferences and broadcasts. This is a pity. But these things must be adjusted to the style of the person concerned.

I have been less and less involved in the information side of the job over the past several months and have devoted myself to pursuing ideas or studying broad areas of interest which I have adjudged to be worthy of the PM's informed attention. This has covered a very wide area: science, defence, foreign policy, economic affairs, language, political issues, personnel policy, etc. While I appreciate the latitude given to me, I must confess to the feeling that the present system of administration is conservative and tradition-bound and is not responsive to new ideas. There is no machinery for pursuing ideas. Often enough they are 'accepted in principle' and then pigeon-holed. . .

I think it is useful to have a non-official ideas man in the PM's Secretariat who could not only put forward and disseminate ideas—think the unthinkable and speak the unspeakable without having to swear allegiance to official dogma—but who also comments on official papers and proposals as a 'semi-official' with a non-bureaucratic background.

Haksar suggested I put in my papers on 1 October, serve out the contractual three months notice period and demit office at the year end.

Before she left for Latin America, the PM returned my note. On this she had written: 'Shri Verghese is a fine, upright young man, sincere and hard-working. It would be not be right for us to stand in his way.'

The next day I composed a formal letter to Haksar. I wrote: 'I deem it a privilege to have had an opportunity of working with the Prime Minister during these eventful years. No one could have been kinder or more generous or understanding. I am also grateful to you for your unfailing kindness and patience towards a younger colleague who readily exploited the wide latitude so ungrudgingly allowed him.'

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Mrs Gandhi kindly hosted a private lunch for Jamila and me at her residence, on New Year's Day.

On 28 December, in the Rajya Sabha, the veteran Communist parliamentarian, Bhupesh Gupta, referred to the government's cosying up to Big Business. The evidence for this was that Verghese was going from the Prime Minister's Office to Birla's *Hindustan Times*, laden with official secrets! He called for a full public inquiry!

On 31 December, I spent the day bidding farewell and clearing my office. I had been both enriched and frustrated by my experience in government. I felt as free as a bird as I walked out of the stately portals of the South Block that New Year's Eve.

Another year, another challenge beckoned.

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6

THE EDITOR'S DEN

It was on New Year's Day, 1969, that I made my debut at *The Hindustan Times*, then located at Connaught Circus, opposite Scindia House. It was only in 1974 that the paper moved to its current premises on Kasturba Gandhi Marg. I knew some of the senior staff but there were many new faces. The general manager, G.N. Sahi, briefed me over a cup of coffee, before walking me to the editorial department for a round of introductions. This done, I rushed off to attend a press conference by the prime minister, seated this time on the other side of the fence.

I had a mixed bag of colleagues and found the morale low and working conditions shoddy. The old hands had little fire in their belly and were soon to retire. It was not easy to coax work out of some. But there were dependable colleagues too. N.S. Jagannathan, later deputy editor, Promilla Kalhan, Rasheed Talib and Sarwar Lateef, and bright young sparks such as Prabha Dutt and Najmul Hasan and newer recruits like T.N Ninan, Sevanti Ninan (nee De), Shyamala Shiveshwarkar, Sumi Krishnan and N.C. Menon. I found the women distinctly superior, and had no hesitation taking them on despite murmurs about their not being put on late shifts, the likelihood of their getting married and going away, or seeking maternity leave, the need to allot them separate toilets, and so on. We were pioneers in the feminisation of our work force. Schools of journalism were few in those days, and all new recruits were absorbed after some in-house 'training'.

The office itself was cramped and shabbily maintained and the facilities poor. I set about improving the working environment and

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rearranging the workplace. The *HT* stable consisted of the daily paper, *The Evening News* and *The Overseas Weekly*. Our sister publication, the Hindi *Hindustan*, was autonomous and edited at that time by Chandulal Chandrakar who later became a Congress MP. Newsprint was controlled and in short supply, and larger papers had to use a quota of white printing paper which was coarser and more expensive. The press required modernisation and lacked capacity, which necessitated earlier deadlines. Offset and computers were one to two decades away. We were still in the hot metal era.

As at the PMO, I had asked for a typewriter and found it quicker and more convenient to type my own copy. I made it a point to reply to all mail, acknowledge all contributions, ensure prompt payments and respond to every complaint or suggestion from readers. This was unheard of. But, quite apart from a minimal courtesy, was good public relations as well.

I would read and mark the *HT* and all the rival Delhi papers every morning and be at the office by 10 a.m. to attend to the dak before taking the morning news conference at 11 a.m. Here the day's edition would be discussed and compared with what our competitors had produced. The meetings were attended by the news editor, the chief sub-editor on duty, the head of the New Delhi news bureau, the chief reporter and the chief photographer. Later, the commercial editor and sports editor were included. The major events of the day, local, state, national and international would be noted and suggestions made about their treatment. State correspondents were alerted about special coverage and requested to send a list of expected stories by afternoon to aid in planning the next day's paper. The news editor's 'conference notes' would be duly signed and circulated. This was one way of keeping in touch with everybody and eliciting feedback.

The news conference was followed at noon by the editorial conference, attended by the assistant editors and our cartoonist, Sudhir Dar, when the paper and news trends would be discussed and topics selected for editorial comment. The broad lines laid out and work assigned, I expected that the edits would be in by five o'clock. They often took longer and sometimes entailed rewriting in terms of style or substance. This made me unpopular with some of my colleagues, but I felt that a paper spoke through its editorials and must impact people's minds and hearts and mould opinion. This kept me late in the office.

In course of time, we introduced an evening news conference to review the first dak edition and prepare a dummy for the main city edition. This entailed taking stock of the stories received or expected

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from our correspondents, parliamentary and court proceedings, foreign news and photographs.

There would be a separate conference on Tuesdays, similarly, to discuss the forthcoming *Sunday Magazine*. Newsprint was scarce and advertising far from buoyant, on account of the permit-licence raj. But as the leading Delhi daily, the *HT* was well supplied with official notices, tenders and classified advertisements. Fond mothers persisted in the quaint belief that marriages were made in heaven; but we knew that the *HT*'s matrimonial columns mattered. The nature and content of these ads over the years is a valuable source for the sociological study of changing social mores and national integration as north met south and love, or a 'decent marriage', gradually triumphed over caste and community.

A set of official notifications that we would read from cover to cover when I was with *The Times of India* had faded away. This was a special gazette issued from Simla (now Shimla) by, or on behalf of, the Film Censor Board in which all objectionable footage carefully censored by the stern guardians of the nation's morals would be recorded in writing. Thus, we would be told, in reel number two or seven in such-and-such a film, footage eight to seventeen (or whatever) had been excised for 'indecent exposure of the heroine's bosom' or 'vulgar swaying of the hips' or 'lingering on the diaphanous clothing of the heroine after she was caught in the rain storm'. It was hilarious stuff and probably more graphic than the offending scene on celluloid. There were also excisions of footage showing 'official drunk on duty' or 'policeman asleep in thana'!

Our prose and idiom needed to be rather more elegant. Infinitives continued to be mercilessly split; 'alternate' was and is even now widely used in place of 'alternative', and 'diffuse' for 'defuse'; the government always 'flayed' or 'lashed out' at the Opposition or vice versa, while reverses or crowds were invariably 'massive'. Then, as now, there would be resort to strong adjectives and a great deal of editorialising in the news columns, a very unprofessional trend that has grown exponentially over time, reducing honest journalism to pamphleteering. I encouraged by-lines, then seldom given or used when allowed, as anonymity provided convenient cover for bad copy or slipshod writing. One battled continuously for better standards and my morning copy of the *HT* would be covered with red markings.

We paid a great deal of attention to readers' views and allocated more space for them. I was particular about granting offended parties the right of correction and reply. In one particular case, (during my time

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at *The Indian Express*), when the character of a senior officer of the Delhi administration was unfairly impugned, I had no hesitation in writing an editorial offering an unqualified apology, an action that only enhanced the credibility of the paper.

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Attention next turned to ways and means of improving our coverage. I insisted that we have a full-time correspondent in every state capital as our readers were drawn from every part of the country because of migration, the national recruitment policies and widening trade and commerce. Equally, our coverage and comment on social and cultural issues was expanded by reducing or dropping expendable items. Among the latter was copy borrowed wholesale from foreign papers such as *The Daily Telegraph* and *Observer*, London, for which we paid a tidy sum only to get a British slant on international affairs. Similarly, a cartoon strip like 'Blondie' and horoscopes. I later realised it was unwise to curtail the weather report to readings from Delhi and a few metros. The weather concerns us all and people do travel and have family and friends elsewhere.

I issued an office order that there should be no reference to or photographs of the editor or his family in the paper. However, a problem arose in 1974 when my older son, Vijay, wrote his All-India Higher Secondary Board Examinations. The results were usually given to the newspapers for publication with an embargo on revealing them in advance; but hordes of anxious students, family and friends would barge into the office or ring up incessantly to find out how Bunty or Dolly had fared. As this caused serious disruption of work and infringed the HSBE/CBSE guidelines, strict instructions were issued that no private disclosures should be made.

On that particular day, Prabha Dutt, one of our star reporters, broke into an editorial meeting to tell me excitedly that Vijay had topped the all-India list. I told her that she had breached an office rule by making an advance disclosure to a parent and should, on no account, now ring up my wife. I also advised the Desk not to front page the news but carry it with the rest of the results on an inside page. By now, other papers had the news and Jamila began receiving calls and requests for interviews with Vijay. A little later, M.N. Kapur, the headmaster of Modern School, from where Vijay had appeared, called to register a strong protest about news of one of his students being blacked out in this fashion. He never let me forget this act of 'censorship'.

I was dismayed by the insularity of much of the Indian press and its

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total unconcern, especially for our Asian and African backyard. So we hired a battery of stringers in over fifteen capitals. Likewise Mohan Khokar (dance), Kavita Nagpal (theatre) and Raghav Menon (music) were among our cultural critics. However, I kept receiving telegrams from the HT Union protesting against our hiring 'outsiders' at 'exorbitant' salaries.

Emoluments were low and, as later in *The Indian Express*, I was bitterly criticised by colleagues for not fighting to jack up salaries and allowances. The reasons for this were many. First, newspapers were governed by the Journalists' Wage Board, a narrowly conceived piece of legislation that went on to create an elaborate caste system of journalists and papers, depending on circulation and language and the categorisation of jobs.

As editor, I found I could not reward good performers by promotion or exploit their talents and enable them to grow, as everybody was slotted into little boxes, and included or excluded by petty unionism and false notions of seniority by entry or age. Thus we carried a lot of drones. G.L. Mehta, first chairman of ICICI, known for his wry humour, would remark that there were working journalists, lurking journalists and shirking journalists! He counted himself among the lurking journalists who wished to write but were seldom invited to do so. Many newspaper establishments clearly harboured several shirking journalists. But the law, alas, bracketed working and shirking journalists and acted as a singular drag on the profession. The second 'problem' was that many publishers, if pushed, were prone to offer pay hikes or greater perks to the editor and a couple of other senior staff in order to co-opt them. I avoided that trap.

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I found K.K. Birla much more amenable to new ideas and experiments than the general manager, who remained staunchly conservative. This allowed some things to move forward, such as the revamping of the weekly overseas edition and a slightly larger and re-formatted *Evening News*. I thought we should try and make the *EN* a lively tabloid with breaking news, features and commentaries on city life, people, culture and entertainment for evening commuters, housewives and young people. We engaged more news boys as hawkers. Many well-known persons who were approached to write declined in the belief that this would be infra dig. I was also soon disabused of the notion that some might even be glad to be honorary writers for a cause, and realised that professionals who earn a living by writing should not be approached to contribute gratis for glory.

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FIRST DRAFT

The *EN* circulation rose and the US Apollo-11 moon landing on 20 July 1969 sent it soaring. The lunar orbital mission, earlier in the year, had created a marked interest in space exploration, but all of humanity watched spellbound as Neil Armstrong and Aldrin stepped on the moon that day with Armstrong saying, 'That's one small step for Man; one giant leap for Mankind'. The *EN* circulation peaked at 22,000 copies before stabilising around 9,000 thereafter. Earlier, when the Soviets first photographed the 'dark side' of the moon, R.K. Laxman drew a brilliant cartoon depicting his Common Man peering at its cratered surface though a microscope, excitedly exclaiming, 'Signs of civic activity here'. That was a wry comment on speculation about life on the moon and the state of Bombay's roads, which were constantly being dug up and left dangerously pitted and potted as a result of this 'civic activity'.

Reporters and the Desk alike were urged to feature positive news, as there was a lot happening in the towns and countryside that was commendable and inspirational. Among the 'causes' we supported was the general 'beautification' of New Delhi, as it was called, through the indefatigable exertions of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) president, S.C. Chhabra, who came under fire from certain quarters for bulldozing his way through various obstacles and opposition. Chhabra invited me to go around New Delhi with him, see what he was attempting to do and then write. I did so and our *HT* team returned impressed and enthused and championed the cause of a cleaner, better Delhi, with fountains, tidy pavements, improved road signs, uniform-sized advertisement hoardings, well-maintained traffic roundabouts and plans to upgrade its environs and light up prominent monuments.

We gave similar support to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) chairman, Jagmohan, another dynamic administrator and stickler for civic discipline, and backed his plans for the conservation of the city's heritage. We persuaded Maheshwar Dayal, scion of an old Delhi family and a keen connoisseur of its art and architectural heritage, to write a series of illustrated articles for *The Sunday Magazine* entitled 'Rediscovering Shahjehanabad'. This evoked much interest and spawned efforts to preserve and restore the city's marvellous heritage.

There was appreciation for the improved look and content of the *HT* and its editorial line from several quarters. Circulation had risen modestly and K.K. Birla too was quite pleased. KK would make suggestions and critically evaluate the paper, including our editorials, but he never asked me to follow any given line against my own judgment. The only occasion for some back-and-forth was when a leading UP industrialist (and a personal friend of KK's) was involved in a court case regarding

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a corporate 'scandal' that I insisted on covering fairly and objectively, without in any way sensationalising the issue. I said that we could not simply ignore the case as it would affect our credibility and morale. The coverage continued and nothing more was said.

My appointment as editor of the *HT*, however, continued to be used as a missile against the PMO or K.K. Birla, as and when required. On 29 August 1969, Kanwar Lal Gupta, a BJP MP, asked the information minister, Inder Gujral, whether it was a fact that the former IA to the PM was appointed editor of a leading local daily on condition that there would be no inquiry into the affairs of the Birla Group!

*

The end of the year appeared to be a good time to take stock and look ahead. In order to do so and to identify special themes of interest and national importance and to locate potential writers on these topics, I convened a series of four informal HT Consultative Group meetings with a number of friends and colleagues in November-December 1969. These were free-wheeling and unstructured discussions. The topics covered a very wide range of social and economic issues and generated lively comment dissent, and many useful leads for further exploration and writing.*

One salient statistic of the time was the estimate that, in 1967-68, 48 per cent of the population, or around 250 million people, lived below the poverty line, with a personal minimum consumption of Rs 20 per month, at 1960-61 prices. It was assumed that a 7 per cent rate of growth would make a significant dent on these numbers by 1975. That was not to happen.

Within a couple of weeks of joining the *HT*, it occurred to me that it would be an excellent idea to run a regular column on any one village as a mirror to rural life. 'News' and public attention seemed fixated on urban developments, even of the most trivial kind, and so many younger people, including many on my own staff, knew no more about village India than what they had seen from the window of a train or bus. This social illiteracy needed correction to get a better focus on 'national news' and for better national integration.

Many in the office were sceptical when we sent a team led by Rasheed Talib to scout around for a suitable village to partner. After some forays, the team returned triumphant. They had discovered

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*The outcome: three long articles I wrote early in 1970 entitled, 'An Agenda for India', later put together in a little booklet (Delhi: *The Hindustan Times*, 1970).

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Chhatera in Haryana's Rohtak (later Sonepat) district, 25 miles north-west of the capital. The village had a population of around 1500 composed of landowning Jats and Brahmins and landless Harijans, and lay within the 'V' of two major drains that carried flood waters to the Yamuna. A bridge over one of the drains was in a state of grave disrepair, thus isolating the village from the tehsil headquarters and the BDO's office. Since the village was not easily accessible, it had been neglected. Chhatera seemed an ideal choice.

It was decided to send out a team of reporters and photographers and do a fortnightly feature in *The Sunday Magazine* titled 'Our Village Chhatera'. The feature carried a logo showing a pretty but shy eight-year-old Dalit girl, Premwati, holding a staff and with a lamb draped around her neck.

Our fortnightly meetings, increasingly accompanied by experts of various kinds, would take place in the cemented Jat *chaupal* in Chhatera under giant neem trees, with raucous peacocks screeching overhead. None was barred from this exclusive precinct on caste grounds.

The first instalment of 'Our Village Chhatera' appeared in the inaugural issue of our new-look *Sunday Magazine* on 22 February 1969. It continued to appear regularly until 1975, making Chhatera the most completely documented village in India or, maybe, the world, jostling for attention with Parliament, elections, drought and flood, debates on the shape and size of the Fourth Plan, Cold War politics, the moon landing, the market, cricket and the cinema.

The feature was reproduced in the overseas *HT* and built a devoted international clientele, alongside administrators, politicians, planners, scientists, academics, diplomats, donor agencies, NGOs and others at home. It entered into the curriculum designed for journalism and communication studies, international development literature and research on social change, and attracted attention and evaluation from many quarters. A host of agencies, looking for field opportunities to demonstrate whatever it was they had to offer, became partners and extension agents in Chhatera. The US ambassador, Kenneth Keating, visited Chhatera and said that perhaps for the first time in American history, an ambassador had inaugurated a *pucca* well, soak pit and toilet block! Four years after our first story, Premwati got married. The column had grown with the village.

I can do no better than reproduce excerpts from something that the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), Singapore, asked me to write in 1976. The Occasional Paper they produced was titled, 'Project Chhatera—an experiment in development journalism':

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We were not sure what we expected of 'Our Village Chhatera' when it was first started. Initially, the villagers were shy, except for the children who delighted in being photographed. The first splash of Chhatera in print was a matter of considerable pride for the villagers. Chhatera was more than just another village, a sleepy hollow. It was news. The ice was broken. Confidence was established. Friendships grew. At first we described the village and its institutions and, of course, the people. The farmers and elders began to tell us their problems. These were reported . . . More than one person had lost his life on the swing bridge (over Drain No. 8). It had begun to sag and fall apart and the carriageway would get submerged during the monsoon when it could not be forded and farmers had to cross the flooded drain. With 80 per cent of the village fields on the other side of the drain, cultivation was affected during the kharif season which coincided with the monsoon . . . (Extension) officials seldom visited the village. There were problems of education, health, communications, sanitation, availability of fertiliser and a hundred other things. But above all there was the problem of the bridge. Chhatera wanted and needed a proper 'all-weather' bridge. Would we please write about this and publish some photographs to drive the point home?

We did. The authorities took notice. The district officials visited Chhatera. A new bridge was sanctioned. Within 18 months traffic was moving across the bridge, including a short-lived bus service, its life cut short by local politics. The block development officer visited the village. Extension workers showed up. Chhatera got the ear of the Deputy Commissioner at district headquarters and of the State Government, 120 miles away.

'Our Village Chhatera' had become a change agent, and publicity an input in development. The *Hindustan Times* found itself playing the role of a catalyst, planting new ideas in the minds of villagers and articulating their aspirations. It seemed logical at this stage to approach various technical and other agencies in Delhi to help Chhatera help itself.

Those approached were more than willing to help. They were looking for opportunities for field work, experiments and demonstrations and were not unmindful of the value of publicity. That many of the concerned institutional heads were friends must have helped too. Health being a

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universal problem, AIIMS was our first port of call. Young interns and junior doctors started coming with us to the village. They conducted a health survey, undertook some prophylactic measures against malaria and launched an immunisation campaign. They brought a stock of drugs with them and treated a variety of ailments on the spot. A medicine chest was funded through local contributions organised by 'Dr' Maha Singh, a dynamic village leader.

> I recall one autumn day when an inspection showed that the medicine chest was empty. Inquiries revealed that the monthly contribution for the purchase of drugs had not been collected. We asked why. Came the reply, 'At this time of the year, no one can afford to be ill.' It was the harvest season. Illness is only a discomfort or an inconvenience, its debilitating effects being insidious and often unseen. But survival depends on work—timely agricultural operations, in this instance. The morning's experience taught us more about rural health problems than all the findings at urban seminars that we had ever reported.

The floods had caused water-logging and saline patches in some fields and affected the quality of water in the wells. This was a matter of concern as it entailed a loss of production and productivity. Scientists from the Indian Agricultural Research Institute came with us and conducted a complete soil survey and water analysis and worked out a new cropping and rotation pattern on the basis of the findings. A Green Revolution followed with the introduction of high-yielding varieties, fertilisers and more irrigation. The number of tubewells doubled in four years.

Tractors were needed to level the fields, but were nationally in short supply. We approached Escorts Ltd, which kindly allocated a few tractors for Chhatera from the directors' quota. Payments were made through loans taken from the newly-opened branch of the Syndicate Bank that we had invited to Chhatera. Many villagers had opened personal accounts, wizened old women digging out earthen pots buried under the floor and stuffed with old coins and dirty notes. As much as Rs 20,000 was deposited within four hours. By 1975, deposits totalled Rs 500,000. The bank was pleased to get an opening into rural Haryana. Business was good and the bank served eight neighbouring villages.

Procuring fertiliser posed another problem. Coromandel Fertilisers Ltd readily helped out with a half tonne gift of nitrogenous fertiliser. We arranged that this be sold at cost price, the proceeds or 'counterpart funds' being used in consultation with the panchayat to brick-pave

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some roads, construct drains, improve and upgrade the primary school and get all eligible children to attend it. The residuary funds were used to dig a pucca well in the Harijan quarter along with a soak pit and a bathing enclosure and, separately, a toilet block for boys and girls beside the school to habituate children to use a latrine rather than go out into the fields, as was the custom.

There was great excitement when we got ISRO to locate a TV set in Chhatera, the first anywhere in Haryana under its Krishi Darshan project. Normally, the set would have been installed in the house of the pradhan but this would have limited viewing and excluded lower caste viewers and women. After some deliberation, it was decided to place the set in the panchayat ghar and bring it out on to the verandah for community viewing. The condition was that everybody, irrespective of caste or gender, should be able to view programmes between 6 and 7 p.m. So for the first time in Haryanvi-Jat history, girls and older women, their faces half-veiled behind ghungats, sat alongside Harijans and Brahmins as equals on the chaupal. As revolutionary was the fact that both daughters of the village and daughters-in-law were present and accepted as equals. Television had brought social integration.

Superstitions die hard, especially among the old. Rattan Singh, the wealthiest man in the village and a retired headmaster, would never use fertiliser. Ramu, an amusing old codger and a progressive farmer, was not one to be taken in by television. Came the American moon landing, which was billed for screening on TV. We informed the villagers. Ramu, however, laughed off the whole thing. The proposition, he patiently explained, was absurd. No one could touch Chandamama. The Americans were obviously playing a hoax. The smart thing to do, he said, would be for Indiraji to call their bluff by saying that the Indians were going to land on the sun!

With income generation, villagers renovate and rebuild their houses—ugly, dysfunctional, expensive brick and mortar structures imitative of the worst in suburbia. So we called in the School of Architecture and Planning, Delhi. Bijit Ghosh assigned his second year town-planning students to prepare a master-plan for Chhatera, for the period 1971-2001, set within a larger regional plan. The students surveyed, measured and photographed the village, talked to all sections of the community and produced a plan with drawings of dwellings, social infrastructure and a general layout that was exhibited in the village. The womenfolk, in particular, found this of absorbing interest. The plan was never implemented. But Chhatera had become a school.

We tried to introduce poultry and dairying, but without much success

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until 1975, when Action for Food Production (AFPRO), an NGO, teamed up with the National Dairy Development Institute, Karnal, to introduce cross-breeding of cattle. The villagers set aside ten acres of land and dug a tubewell to grow fodder for sale, especially to landless farmers. The bank offered micro-credit. Dairying began to flourish in the village.

In order to avoid any farm or class bias, and having devoted special attention to issues like health and sanitation, the *HT* extended its coverage to the neighbouring villages of Malla Majra and Akbarpur Barota. In Majra we concentrated exclusively on the Harijan weaving community, encouraging it to form a cooperative which sold its produce to Fabindia, a leading handloom promoter from Delhi.

A newspaper is not equipped to be a rural extension agent and community development manager. Our fortnightly visits were too infrequent for supervision and close follow-up, and the twenty other agencies we roped in were largely dependent on us for transport and stimulus. None had any independent budget for Chhatera. It was for most a labour of love and a learning experience. We did not employ any external extension agency. Nevertheless, the experiment succeeded. It told the urban reader something about Bharat, next door yet half a world away. The young people who reported on Chhatera not only became better journalists but well-rounded Indians. Above all, the *HT* won the affection of a village community and in some little measure enabled it to grow. It is still remembered thirty years on, as some recent studies reveal. And that, surely, is sufficient reward.

*

Over and beyond the *HT*, life went on. The weeks before the 1969 Gandhi centenary saw the Congress move inexorably towards a split. The rumblings grew louder. Morarji spoke of feeling sidelined. The Congress, mauled in the February general elections in West Bengal (which saw the consolidation of the Left Front) and Punjab (where the communal rift was bridged by an Akali-BJP coalition), and left limping in UP and Bihar, was reluctant to form coalitions. In West Bengal a crisis soon erupted with the governor, Dharam Vira, refusing to read certain passages from the governor's address presented to him by the state government. These would have brought the federal government into disrepute and contempt. And would have virtually amounted to severing the state's institutional ties with the Centre. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena staged riots (causing forty-nine deaths), demanding Belgaum's merger with the state, while Telengana agitated for separation from Andhra in order to spur its development and open up local opportunities.

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Meanwhile, the President, Dr Zakir Hussain, succumbed to a heart attack, plunging the nation into another crisis. V.V. Giri was sworn in as acting President and soon threw his hat into the ring for election to that office, with Sanjiva Reddy, the Lok Sabha speaker, being bruited as a possible rival candidate. This forced the factional cracks within the Congress wide open. Some urged Jayaprakash Narayan to stand as a candidate, in the hope that he might rise above the fray and hold the nation together. But JP was reluctant, pleading his commitment to gramdan and sarvodaya, which he considered more important.

Matters came to a head on 9/10 July when the Congress Working Committee met in Bangalore, and the PM gave vent to 'some stray thoughts' (based on a paper prepared by the party's Young Turks led by Chandrashekhar), which she confessed she had not fully read. This set out a new economic policy with a radical 'socialist' orientation, which had the nationalisation of banks and the taking over of raw material imports as the centrepiece. Further, she supported Giri for presidentship but then proposed Jagjivan Ram, charging her colleagues with springing a surprise on her by sponsoring and then, by majority vote, formally naming Sanjiva Reddy as the party candidate. The fat was in the fire.

Events moved fast. The party maintained no more than a façade of unity until the presidential poll in August, but knives were out. Giri announced his own candidature. A wounded Mrs G returned to Delhi and stripped Morarji of his finance portfolio though not of his position as DPM. I met the PM shortly thereafter. Her defence was that though Morarji had accepted the Bangalore resolution on economic policy, he had, in the past, been 'obstructive' in policy implementation. Morarji understandably resigned. Chavan was very upset too and felt that the PM had played her cards poorly and was herself responsible for much of the non-implementation she complained about. I met Morarji the next day. When I said I hoped the party would not split he retorted with some acerbity, 'But who is splitting the party? What is it that I have not implemented?' Kamaraj too was bewildered.

On 19 July, the Cabinet decided to nationalise all banks with deposits in excess of fifty crore rupees. The PM broadcast to the nation that same evening but had nothing much to say and certainly no programme. This led us to comment that bank nationalisation could not be an end in itself and seemed a political manoeuvre without any clear economic thrust. Within the party, Kamaraj, Chavan and Atulya Ghosh supported bank nationalisation while Morarji and S.K. Patil opposed it, thus splitting the so-called Syndicate. Morarji was bitter. He told the Press Club he had been shabbily treated and 'dropped like a brinjal or tomato'. In Patil's

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view, a 'coterie' was leading the country 'to communism and bankruptcy'. Mrs G had gained the political initiative, even though the Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party challenged the nationalisation decree before the Supreme Court, some days later.

The ensuing period saw the PM make fighting speeches at workers' rallies at the Gol Methi Chowk roundabout in front of her residence, and the venue for much political theatre. She proclaimed bank nationalisation a first step towards 'bigger things' and an ideological war between 'a few rich and the many poor', 'we and they'. But ultimate victory was assured. All this was heady wine.

A few days thereafter, she spoke of threats to her life! The Joan of Arc syndrome had begun to take hold. The *HT* continued to plead for unity but things had obviously gone too far. The PM rejected the demand for a party whip to compel its MPs and MLAs to vote for Sanjiva Reddy, the presidential candidate officially supported by the Congress. She called for a 'conscience vote' instead. The Indira faction hinted at a 'conspiracy' engineered by the Congress President, S. Nijalingappa, and claimed that a sinister plot was afoot to get Sanjiva Reddy elected with Jana Sangh and Swatantra support, after which the newly-elected President would be used to unseat the prime minister.

Independence Day was filled with foreboding. Voting for the presidential poll took place on 16 August with a third candidate, C.D. Deshmukh, also contesting. The final result was announced at 10 p.m. on 20 August 1969. Giri scraped through with a narrow margin of 14,650 second preference votes. Crowds had gathered in front of the *HT* election scoreboard and Giri's election was greeted with whoops and bhangra dancing. The count in Parliament favoured Giri 359 to 258, with 101 votes going to Deshmukh.

Earlier, addressing a group of UP MPs, the PM had spoken of opposition to her and her policies, and commented on the manner in which the Congress Parliamentary Board had decided in favour of Sanjiva Reddy. Further, the prestige and office of prime minister had been denigrated, she said, and then went on to appeal for unity and socialist commitment, a revitalised party and a united leadership. It was too late. Nijalingappa issued show cause notices to the PM and her principal supporters, but these were simply ignored.

While the supremacy of the prime minister over the organisational wing of the ruling party had to be conceded and upheld in a parliamentary democracy, Mrs Gandhi was largely to blame for not asserting herself. We also noted editorially that the concept of a 'Congress High Command' was of colonial vintage. 'But the confusion persists,

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because of the permanent interference of the High Command in the States. This is an area where the Prime Minister has joined with the other members of the Congress Working Committee and Central Parliamentary Board in curtailing the autonomy of Congress Chief Ministers and leaders of the Congress Legislature Parties.' That remains true even today.

A couple of days later, I had another lengthy meeting with the PM when she offered an elaborate explication, and added an interesting aside. President Nixon had been to Delhi a little earlier, and she paraphrased him as saying, 'Madam, I don't understand the intricacies of bank nationalisation; but you have done less expensively what we achieved with the Moon shot . . . rid the US of a feeling of disunity and disenchantment.' He then added that the Bangalore decision on the presidential nominee worried Americans who wondered if the PM and government were strong and stable. They were glad that she had 'retrieved the office'.

When the so-called 'conspiracy theory' was mentioned, she replied that Nijalingappa had talked to the Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party, especially N.G. Ranga, and added, 'I know every word of who said what to whom.' She said Chavan was also in the conspiracy as he wanted to be PM. Moving to another crucial topic, the social control of banking, she said that Adarkar, deputy chairman of the Reserve Bank, had told her that it was a farce.

I met a bemused Nijalingappa and asked what it would take for a settlement. He replied, 'Indira must admit to a wrong and then we can adjust.' Would he meet her? His self-respect would not permit that, but if she sought to meet him he would agree and treat her like a sister. Haksar agreed with me that the PM could meet Nijalingappa on neutral ground at Rashtrapati Bhavan the next day, after the new President was sworn in. Nothing happened, though the Congress Working Committee adopted a unity resolution stating that there had been mistakes and misunderstandings all round, and bygones should be bygones. The wrench of parting was being felt. By then, however, the PM had established a parliamentary majority within the Congress. There was no going back. At another Gol Methi Chowk meeting, she reportedly warned that 'the enemy is lying low; be prepared for the big fight'.

Desultory shots kept being fired by both sides. Ultimately, two parallel Congress Working Committees met. Then, on 13 November, the CWC formally expelled Mrs G from primary membership of the Congress. The divide soon manifested itself in the state ministries. Two rival AICCs convened. The Indira Congress was reduced to a minority

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in Parliament and, for the first time since Independence, the Lok Sabha saw a recognised Opposition party and a leader of the Opposition, both from the 'other' Congress. The papering over the widening cracks was blown away. The Congress, India's Grand Old Party, had split.

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The *HT* posited 'Unity for What?' against 'Power for What?' and argued that the essential divide was not between the so-called Left and Right as between the forces of outmoded tradition and modernity. Many old radicals had become new conservatives because they had slumbered while the world moved on. Even a liberal American like John Kenneth Galbraith had expressed astonishment at the conservatism of India's 'post office socialism'.

More worrying was the cry for 'committed civil servants' and 'committed judges' rather than a fair and impartial administration that was not the handmaid of any party or ideology and obedient to the rule of law. If civil servants were to be 'committed' to the Congress at the Centre they would, by the same token, have to be 'committed' to the Jana Sangh administration in Delhi, to Jyoti Basu in West Bengal, a Swatantra administration in Orissa, the DMK in Madras, the Akalis in Punjab and so on. The civil servant would have to turn politician and, chameleon-like, change political hue with every change in administration.

Political upheavals were not the only cause for worry. Wolf Ladejinsky, the man behind Japan's post-war land reforms that MacArthur pushed through, was brought to India by the World Bank. He had done two papers after visits to Ludhiana and Purnea, and his finding was that the Green Revolution was pushing up land values and setting in motion an 'enclosure movement' with owners taking land back from tenants. Moreover, sharecroppers and under-tenants were unable to invest in high yielding varieties and fertilisers for lack of collateral for credit. He feared rural violence was in the offing.

I suggested he meet Haksar and JP, and set up meetings for him with both. The PM needed a land programme, which Ladejinsky could provide. Moreover, Bihar was under President's Rule and therefore the Centre could act decisively. Ladejinsky met JP and Haksar within a few days and rang me greatly enthused, saying that he felt he was 'almost in business' in India, after breaking his head for years. Two days later, in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, London, Jagjivan Ram, the agriculture minister, who had once confessed that he had forgotten to pay his income tax, stated that the country would have to go slow with land reform as conservative farmers—clearly the upper caste

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landowners—could not be alienated. Instead, an urban property tax was contemplated. Hurrah for 'socialism'!

The centre of gravity of Naxalism moved to Srikakulam as West Bengal was caught up in Naxalite urban guerrilla warfare, as the original Naxalbari peasant movement in Bengal fractured and became urbanised. Independently, Andhra and Bihar emerged as new focal points leading in time to the formation of the People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre, respectively, whose subsequent merger created the present CPI (Maoist).

There were many other notable events during 1969 which may be randomly cited. India's first nuclear power station at Tarapur went on stream. Jawaharlal Nehru University opened its portals with G. Parthasarathi as its first Vice Chancellor. K.N. Raj, who had raised the Delhi School of Economics to a rare pinnacle of academic distinction, was vilified as a 'pro-communist politician' by right-wing MPs when short-listed for appointment as Vice Chancellor of Delhi University. We denounced such McCarthyism. The appointment was rightly confirmed.

Assam agitated for a third oil refinery in the state rather than have its oil pumped through a pipeline to the Barauni refinery in Bihar, a location favoured as being nearer consumption centres and therefore allegedly more viable on techno-economic considerations.

A J&K State Peoples Convention convened by Sheikh Abdullah proposed a five-tier structure for the entire state (including PAK and the Northern Areas) at the panchayat, block, zone, provincial/regional and state level, with a marked degree of autonomy or devolution at each level.

The Lok Pal Bill to establish a central ombudsman emerged from a joint parliamentary select committee without being able to secure an amendment that would bring the prime minister under its ambit. (This hurdle has not yet been overcome, the rather thin argument being that the removal of the prime minister must be a political rather than a judicial act.)

The country was again racked with terrible communal riots in Ahmedabad-Gujarat, Jabalpur and elsewhere. Delhi had a black-out exercise, the second in six months, prompting one to ask what end this absurd tamasha was intended to serve.

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The end of October saw the most unfortunate death of Darshan Singh Pheruman, who had fasted for seventy-four days demanding Chandigarh's transfer to Punjab. The *HT* described this as an unnecessary tragedy:

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> It took Darshan Singh Pheruman 74 days to commit suicide. His agonising ordeal and the sacrifice of his life does not alter the basic fact that he acted unwisely. He sought to coerce the Government of India into taking a decision and he failed. Had he succeeded, or if he still does, then India would be the loser. For parliamentary government and constitutional government cannot long survive if extra-parliamentary and extra-constitutional methods are allowed to prevail . . . If the future of Chandigarh can be settled by such means then why not the future of Telengana, the question of another refinery in Assam, the Belgaum border issue, statehood for Manipur or Himachal, the Narmada water dispute, the location of industry, the appointment of key personnel, and so on ad infinitum . . . It requires courage, character and integrity to live and fight for one's ideals and convictions in a free society.

Some would cite Gandhi in justification of indefinite fasts. There was alien rule then. The age and context were different.

The Punjab situation took another turn when the Akalis declared that Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script, and not Urdu (which was generally used), would be the state's official language. This immediately polarised the communities with Hindus being called upon to declare their language as Hindi in the forthcoming census.

On another plane, India's wholly misplaced attempt to muscle its way into the Islamic Summit at Rabat, in September 1969 (after being initially rebuffed), was a major diplomatic embarrassment. The conference had been convened to discuss the recent fire in the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. In the event, the India delegation was kept out as not all its members were Muslim. Yet, when the conference ended two days later, a statement was issued in the name of all the participating countries 'and the Muslims of India'. Fakhruddin Ahmed, the leader of the Indian delegation, protested. The whole thing was a fiasco, with Pakistan opposing Indian participation from the inside, citing the Ahmedabad riots. We wrote a strong editorial:

> The stark truth is that this was an obvious manifestation of what might appropriately be described as the Kashmir factor in Indian diplomacy. Fifty per cent of India's foreign policy is permanently dictated and determined by the Kashmir factor. India wanted to be at Rabat in order not to leave the field clear for Pakistan and to woo the Muslim nations gathered there on Kashmir or Indo-Pakistan relations generally. It is for the same

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reason that India fought for an invitation to the Islamic conference in Kuala Lumpur earlier this year. It is for the same reason again that India's 'great triumph' at the Belgrade conference of non-aligned nations was in somehow managing to keep out Pakistan. The enormous distortions that the Kashmir factor has introduced in India's foreign policy and even its domestic policy, whether consciously or unconsciously, has resulted in double-talk, double-think, and unprincipled contortions for many years ...

The hawks never tire of repeating that there cannot be any 'concession' to Pakistan. What they do not realise is that the Kashmir factor every day exacts a very heavy price and that India's own self-interest demands an honourable settlement.

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The economy, meanwhile, continued to be battered by 'socialist' rhetoric. Despite idle capacity in both the public and private sectors, it was reported that 45 units in the private sector had violated licensing conditions and established excess capacity. Of these, 37 units had actually dared to register an output 25 per cent in excess of the capacity licensed during 1965-67. This fixation with capacity at the cost of production provided a bizarre example of perversely restrictive thinking.

By the year end, the Indira Congress had produced a paper on redistributive justice recommending nationalisation of tea, jute, shipping, automobiles, insurance and foreign trade. A capital levy was also mooted on incomes over Rs 5 lakhs, the marginal rate going up to 90 per cent in the highest slab. A Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices Bill straitjacketed 'dominant producers' and enterprises with inter-linked assets in excess of one crore rupees. Altogether this was calculated to enmesh all growing and dynamic industries in a web of controls.

Mrs Gandhi's budget for 1970-71, presented a few months later, gave relief to lower income groups while attempting to soak the rich by raising the marginal rate of income tax to 93 per cent, in addition to a wealth tax liability. She had earlier suffered a political reverse when the Supreme Court struck down bank nationalisation, mandating larger compensation and payments in cash rather than in bonds as proposed. Within weeks, however, the government re-nationalised the fourteen major Indian banks after removing the offending infirmities. This had been preceded by unbridled criticism of the court and its judges who were accused of being 'traditional and conservative', flouting the will of the people, setting themselves up as a Third Chamber, and being an

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obstacle to progress. Chief Justice Hidayatullah, however, said that 'the Constitution speaks through the court'. The court had earlier placed the Fundamental Rights beyond amendment through the Golak Nath judgment, which was later amplified through its Keshavananda Bharati order that permanently entrenched the 'basic features of the Constitution'.

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It was at this time the ambition of many in India to build a small people's car to replace the eternal Hindustan Ambassador, Fiat 1100 and Standard that were being produced in the country. Nehru had reportedly said of the Ambassador that everything in it made a sound, except the horn! Nonetheless, it was a sturdy vehicle and enjoyed a near official monopoly in all government garages. The 'small car' concept suddenly found a place in an 'addendum' to the Fourth Plan document, and before long Mrs Gandhi's younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, was granted a letter of intent to produce a wholly indigenous small car.

Meanwhile, the hijacking of aircraft had suddenly intruded into diplomacy during the continuing West Asian crisis. Aircraft were diverted and passengers held to ransom against political demands. India had, at the time, introduced a system of 'P' Form approvals sanctioning foreign exchange from the Reserve Bank for different categories of overseas travel. The rules were quite stringent, even if sometimes evaded; but ordinary passengers were punctilious in abiding by the regulations. A joke that did the rounds at the time was that a hijacker took over a passenger flight and announced that the aircraft was being diverted to Tripoli. Whereupon an Indian passenger was heard plaintively protesting that his 'P' Form entitlement was specifically approved only for travel to Rome and the consequences for him could be very severe!

The press too was coming under pressure, more blatantly in some states. Mounting criticism of the government attracted the ire of the establishment which inveighed against 'big newspapers' and the 'jute' or 'monopoly' press owned by big business houses. The message was that the media must conform and toe the government line, just like broadcasting, a state monopoly, which was kept in thrall.

Feeling the heat from the partisanship of the government's broadcast media, Morarji told me he realised now how mistaken he had been to oppose autonomy for AIR through its corporatisation. The government was, however, not inclined to yield. Some months later, the information and broadcasting ministry proposed that, maybe, AIR could be run as a semi-autonomous body modelled on the Posts and Telegraph Board. This was seen as an exercise in evasion. After much equivocation, the

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government finally rejected the Chanda Committee's recommendation that AIR be made an autonomous corporation.

It soon became apparent that the need of the hour was for editors to stand up to pressure from the government. In the ensuing years, there were increasing complaints about pressures on the press. But, as a wag aptly put it, the press in India was so busy defending its freedom that it did not find the time to exercise it! Urging positive restructuring of editorial control over the press, I proposed to K.K. Birla that he appoint a board of editorial trustees consisting of truly independent figures of stature, introducing what I called 'public interest directors' on the boards of family or corporately-owned papers like the *HT*, to buffer them from specific family or corporate interests.

There were pressures on the foreign media too. The government overreacted to the screening in Calcutta, by the BBC, of a documentary made by a French director, Louis Malle, depicting the squalor of the city's slums. The screening was stopped and the government virtually demanded censorship rights over foreign channels. The BBC preferred to quit India and stayed out for a while.

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In October, I took a busman's holiday with the family, motoring up the Hindustan Tibet Road, which had been improved and extended by the Border Roads Organisation right up to the border passes at Shipki La and Kaurik. It was a fine piece of work and the General Engineering Reserve Force boys, a cheerful and dedicated lot, were still at it. We followed the Sutlej. Kinnar-Kailash, towering ahead of us at 22,000 feet, beckoned. The next we knew was that the high range had disappeared; when we looked around we found the snow peaks behind us. We had cut through the Great Himalayan Range. Leo Pargial stood like a sentinel overlooking the Shipki Pass. We drove past apple orchards and groves of peach, apricot, walnut and chilghoza pine. We were warmly welcomed and feasted at the Army's border posts and spent some time with the jawans. This higher ground was in the rain shadow area and, therefore, relatively bare even below the tree line. It was inhabited by a small, scattered population that lost out when trade with Tibet closed down.

A month later, I took a trip to Chandigarh and Ludhiana to take soundings on the unresolved Punjab-Haryana tangle. Most, including some Haryanvis, agreed with the *HT* line that Chandigarh should go to Punjab and that Haryana could remain a guest there for five years, by when a fine new capital could be built for it elsewhere. Haryana had no

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historic focal centre, places like Gurgaon, Faridabad and Sonepat being extended suburbs of Delhi and part of the National Capital Region. Unfortunately, the lines had hardened.

Both states seemed well poised to become national granaries, an impression confirmed by a visit to the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. Crop diversification seemed the best way to break the paddy-wheat cycle. Dairying with crossbred cattle and fodder cropping and poultry offered great promise. I visited Jullundur (now Jalandhar) where I met Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi editors. The future of Chandigarh and the political fallout of the current impasse were uppermost in most minds. (The Akalis, however, had given an assurance that their demand was for a Punjabi suba, a linguistic state, and not a Sikh homeland.)

Driving after dark from Jullunder to Chandigarh, I found the countryside dotted with lights. These marked tubewell pump houses and adjacent farm deras or homesteads, with link roads leading to and connecting clusters of newly-electrified villages with twinkling lights. The Punjab landscape was changing.

Back in Delhi, communal rioting during the past months had engendered widespread debate. A fallout of this was a resolution adopted by the Jana Sangh at its Patna session specifically calling for the 'Indianisation' of all 'fissiparous elements, especially of those with extra-territorial loyalties or allegiances, overt or covert, to the two-nation or multi-nation theory'. Six months later, at a press conference in Delhi, Golwalkar, the RSS chief, called for the 'Indianisation' not merely of Muslims, but other 'un-Indian' elements as well.

The Bhiwandi riots in May 1970, and subsequent disturbances in Maharashtra, Bihar and Assam, added to the list of disgraceful communal eruptions in the country. The prime minister rightly blamed those preaching hate and separateness and sectarian chauvinism, naming the RSS, Jana Sangh and Shiv Sena. The Jana Sangh retaliated, holding Muslim communalism responsible.

One consequence of this manifestation of the religious divide was the social pressure against mixed-faith marriages—a blatant case occurring in a Delhi college—and an attempt through the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Bill to divide tribal communities into Christian and non-Christian categories, excluding the former from reservations and other benefits, a move strongly resented in the North-east, in particular. The National Integration Council, now two years old, seemed unable to cope, having itself become a rather politicised body.

Early into the New Year, the country witnessed the unprecedented spectacle of the President of India, V.V. Giri, appearing before the

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Supreme Court since his election had been impugned. Here was a singular demonstration of the supremacy of law rather than of the Supreme Court. The dignity and decorum with which the affair was managed redounded to the credit of all concerned. The election was upheld.

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The battle over the abolition of privy purses, which dragged on through the year, was less edifying. As part of its socialist package, the government decided to do away with privy purses, which individual princes had negotiated at the time of accession and the integration of their states. A newly-formed Concord of Princes said it was prepared to negotiate a fair settlement. A little later, the government let it be known that it was considering doing away with the special privileges of ICS officials. Both developments caused disquiet about the government's credibility and willingness to abide by solemn constitutional commitments.

Responding to pressures from party 'radicals', the government decided to force the privy purse issue by moving a Constitution Amendment Bill in the winter session of Parliament. The princes threatened to go to court. The government managed to pass the bill by a narrow margin in the Lok Sabha but failed to win a two-thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha as required, and the bill was defeated by a single vote. Undaunted, Mrs Gandhi decided to press ahead and abolish the privy purses through a presidential order 'de-recognising' the princes.

The *HT* editorially castigated this as a brazen and petty display of the 'arrogance of power' and an affront to Parliament and constitutionalism. The extraordinary haste and petulance displayed was further compounded by grave suspicions that were never fully cleared that the decision to issue a presidential order was taken by the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet and was conveyed to the President in Hyderabad, where he was at the time, before the Cabinet ratified the decision. This, we argued, was a grave constitutional impropriety as the Council of Ministers is the constitutionally empowered body that 'aids and advises the President in the exercise of his functions'.

Even more disconcerting was the allegation made by Bhupesh Gupta (CPI) in the Rajya Sabha that attempts had been made to purchase votes, a charge to be repeated more than once in the Narasimha Rao/ Jharkhand Mukti Morcha case and, more recently, during the confidence vote on the civil nuclear deal on 22 July 2008.

The midnight executive order de-recognising the princes was struck

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down by an eleven-judge bench of the Supreme Court with only two judges dissenting. Mrs Gandhi's riposte was not long in coming. Shortly before the New Year, she dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for fresh general elections. (She gambled on winning a snap election with a large margin and then passing an ordinance to abolish privy purses.)

The BKD-led government under Charan Singh in UP, from which the Congress withdrew support, was thereafter dismissed and the state placed under President's Rule by a pliant governor even though Charan Singh had claimed a majority, which he was prepared to prove when the House reassembled as scheduled, a week later. The draft presidential order was flown to President Giri in Moscow where he was on a state visit. The prime minister seemed now truly to be on a slippery slope and unconcerned about undermining constitutional processes in the single-minded pursuit of power.

The prospect of elections after the Congress split hastened the formation of a so-called Grand Alliance a right-of-centre formation built around the old-guard Congress Organisation Party or Congress(O) in opposition to the Congress Requisition Party or Congress (R) owing allegiance to Mrs Gandhi. Litigation followed to establish title to legitimacy and the party heritage. The Congress (O) won the Congress election symbol and property. The Congress (R), soon better known as the Indira Congress or Congress (I), gained power.

Meanwhile, the Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party had also witnessed some consolidation through the privy purse controversy.

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The Indus Waters Treaty came into full operation in 1970. The commissioning of the Rana Pratap Sagar Dam added another three lakh acres of irrigation from the Chambal Project. But in the south, the Cauvery dispute erupted around the same time, marking the beginning of a whole series of bitter river water disputes.

On the positive side, food production during the year touched a record one hundred million tonnes. Yet the runaway growth in population continued to worry concerned citizens. J.R.D. Tata, Bharat Ram (DCM), H.P. Nanda (Escorts), Soli Godrej and some other industrialists took the initiative to launch the Family Planning Foundation, now the Population Foundation of India, to supplement official efforts at the motivational, advocacy and research levels. I was inducted into this body almost from the start.

As worrying as the feared population explosion was an external population threat—the mounting influx of migrants from East Pakistan

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compounded by the alleged persecution of Hindus, the number in the first half of 1970 being estimated at 125,000. The *HT* counselled against any semblance of an open door policy based on an implicit categorisation of entrants into Hindu 'refugees' and Pakistani (read Muslim) 'infiltrators'.

Otherwise, too, the situation in East Pakistan was coming to a boil. A devastating cyclone that had hit the deltaic region the previous November had engendered bitterness and complaints about tardy and insensitive relief by the government. There was another potential flashpoint as well. East Pakistan's Awami League now swept the national elections, and managed to gain an absolute majority, a result that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whose Pakistan Peoples Party had won a majority of the seats in West Pakistan although it had not fared quite so well overall, was determined to nullify. The unfolding tragedy was to culminate in war with India and the bloody liberation of Bangladesh.

That was not all. Mao smiled on the Indian envoy in Beijing, Brajesh Mishra, signalling willingness for a new relationship with India. He also continued to smile on Pakistan, consolidating a growing strategic partnership first initiated in 1963. Pakistan lobbied hard for China's long-delayed admission to the Security Council, and started to play a quiet role as a secret intermediary between the US and China.

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General elections were announced in late November 1970, and the Lok Sabha was dissolved with Mrs G heading a minority government. The opposition argued that this was a constitutional impropriety and demanded the appointment of a caretaker national government. This was an invalid proposition and cut no ice. Hectic campaigning was followed by staggered polling over the first ten days of March 1971. A number of complaints were registered regarding incomplete voter lists and the misuse of official machinery by the government, including the use of IAF aircraft and helicopters (routinely justified by security considerations). Also canvassed were issues of election costs and violence, the intrusion of frivolous candidates and shell parties, the matter of election broadcasts and the need for the chief election commissioner to be supported by a number of election commissioners and even regional election commissioners, as permitted by the Constitution.

Mrs Gandhi won a famous victory, her slogan of 'garibi hatao' triumphing over the opposition National Democratic Front's cry of 'Indira hatao'. Her campaign was sensibly pitched on a note of

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moderation rather than vote-catching radicalism, and employment and price stabilisation were listed among her most urgent priorities. The state units of the Congress (I) and its allies like the DMK fared equally well. The one sad flaw was the externment order passed on Sheikh Abdullah from J&K and the arrest of leading lights of the Plebiscite Front, thus vitiating the credibility of the polls in that state. Elsewhere, the real test now lay ahead.

'Garibi hatao' was fortuitously linked to a seminal study by V.N. Dandekar and Nilakantha Rath titled *Poverty in India*, which provided a framework for relating growth with social justice. The thesis in brief was that the growth of the Indian economy had been unsatisfactory, the benefits accruing largely to the rich and upper middle class, leaving the poor untouched or even worse off than before. Hence the need for a more equitable distribution of resources, in order to ensure a national minimum without sacrificing growth.

Rejecting a lowering of land ceilings and avoidance of modern labour-saving technology, the authors recommended offering assured employment to all those willing to work on a minimum wage, on projects that could be immediately initiated and undertaken, such as land development, irrigation, afforestation and road construction, which would place in their hands the means to attain the stipulated minimum standard of living. Here was a first cut of what the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee and the 2005 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act later sought to achieve.

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Even before the polls, the beginnings of a new crisis could be discerned. Early in February, an Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship was hijacked to Lahore. The hijackers were welcomed by the Pakistanis, who subsequently permitted the plane to be blown up. The thirty passengers and crew were repatriated to India by land. India responded by banning over-flights of Pakistani aircraft in its air space, between Pakistan's two wings.

That hurt Pakistan as events in East Pakistan were coming to a head. Unwilling to give the victorious Awami League any quarter, a paranoid Zulfikar Ali Bhutto aborted the newly-elected Constituent Assembly meeting that was to take place in Dacca. President Yahya Khan, politically bulldozed by Bhutto, kept bumbling, and on 23 March ordered a brutal crackdown in East Pakistan to stamp out 'treason'. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was proclaimed a traitor and arrested.

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This declaration of war on its own people by Pakistan was matched by a declaration of Bangladeshi independence by Major Ziaur Rahman who rallied Bangla military loyalists. Many of the top Awami League leaders went underground to organise the Mukti Bahini, a people's militia, and set up a Bangladesh government-in-exile that later surfaced in 'Mujibnagar', a scarcely-veiled reference to its nominal headquarters at Theatre Road, Calcutta.

Refugees started pouring into India. Tension rose along the border as troops confronted one another. Yahya Khan sought meetings with Mrs Gandhi but India insisted that he must settle with Mujib. The flow of refugees had to be stemmed and the tide reversed. China's pledge of support to Pakistan fetched a Soviet warning against adventurous policies. The US prevaricated, calling on India to show restraint while rearming Pakistan. Europe joined India in condemning the genocide that had now been recorded by several sources, including Anthony Mascarenhas, a West Pakistani journalist who published a graphic and gory eyewitness account of what he had seen.

India was not indifferent and, apart from training, arming and assisting the Mukti Bahini, para-military forays were conducted across the border to engage the Pakistani army and keep it occupied.

The Nixon 'tilt' against India was soon evident. The publication of *The Pentagon Papers* that gave an inside account of US deceptions, failures and lapses in Vietnam had caused deep embarrassment in Washington. Nevertheless, a Sino-American détente had commenced in April when an American team was invited to a ping-pong tournament in China with full American press coverage.

On 19 July, Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, visited Delhi but found no time to look at the refugee camps, now holding seven million refugees. He spoke feebly of 'bureaucratic muddle' in extenuation of continuing arms shipments to Pakistan, and then went to Islamabad from where he made a secret visit to Beijing to meet Mao, with Pakistan facilitating this quiet diplomacy. The ice had been truly broken and Sino-US relations were on the mend, a development that Nixon rightly viewed as of historic significance. He 'tilted' towards Yahya in gratitude.

Events followed swiftly. Kissinger told the Indian ambassador in Washington, L.K. Jha, that India must not count on a positive American response should China intervene in favour of Islamabad in any Indo-Pakistan conflict. The Soviet foreign minister, Gromyko, flew into Delhi to sign a twenty-year Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. The Indian foreign minister, Swaran Singh, described this

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as 'a Treaty of Non-Aggression and a credible deterrent to any powers that may have aggressive designs on our territorial integrity and sovereignty'.

At the *HT*, we took the line that the treaty was essentially a mutual security pact bordering on a military alliance, and a departure from our professed stance of non-alignment. We also argued that the danger of Chinese tanks rolling down the south Himalayan slopes from Tibet into India in aid of Pakistan was a trifle over-pitched and that such an adventure would cost it dearly, in contrast to the events of 1962. Further, such an invasion would surely attract intervention from the Soviet Union even without a treaty, in view of its own strategic interests. It was, however, a done deal.

A Pakistani White Paper charged India with masterminding a deep conspiracy to dismember it, using Mujibur Rahman as a cat's-paw. On 26 March, Yahya Khan spoke of a constitutional breakdown and the need to put down the Awami League's civil disobedience movement. When large-scale massacres by the Pakistani Army and its agents could no longer be denied, the death and destruction were pinned on communal and racial riots.

In mid-April, Pakistan's director of military intelligence officially stated that the Bengali component of the army and police had mutinied. And the Pakistani Army was compelled to launch a preemptive strike on the night of 25 March in order to forestall an Indian-aided secessionist coup. Yahya Khan also denounced the recent election in East Pakistan as a fraud.

India was not idle. September saw a gathering of twenty-four nations in Delhi, which pronounced the developments in East Pakistan a 'major human disaster' to which UN Secretary General U Thant had also drawn attention in his report to the UN. Swaran Singh, back as India's foreign minister, addressed the General Assembly to assert that a political solution was essential but could only be worked out with Mujibur Rahman, leader of the largest political party in Pakistan. If a solution was delayed, worse could follow.

Mrs Gandhi undertook a flurry of visits to take counsel with Western leaders and to keep them posted on the ground realities. She said in Moscow that India had thus far resisted pressures to recognise an independent Bangladesh and had ruled out direct military action, but the refugee influx must stop and be reversed.

The East Pakistan crisis, however, was rapidly deepening into an Indo-Pakistan military confrontation, with Yahya Khan threatening 'total war'. Indian positions around East Pakistan were already being

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shelled and there had been border skirmishes. With the situation fast deteriorating, India invoked Article IX of the Indo-Soviet Treaty, providing for mutual consultations to 'remove' a threat of attack on either party.

In Brussels and Vienna, Mrs Gandhi came up against an in-built European hesitation to do anything suggestive of interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan, the view there being that an Indo-Pakistan conflagration should be prevented through concerted UN action. Bhutto was in Peking with a military delegation even as Mrs Gandhi reached Washington, where Nixon mouthed banalities. The US, at the time, was busy mending fences with China, which had just been accepted into the UN in place of Taiwan, ending a fiction that India had consistently challenged from the start. Pakistan had helped muster the support of the Islamic bloc and non-aligned nations in favour of seating China, and Peking had reason to feel obliged.

I travelled to West Bengal and along what was then the East Pakistan border up to Tripura, visiting refugee camps and talking to local commanders and political leaders to assess the situation. The proportions of the refugee relief effort were truly staggering, with huge numbers under canvas or in schools and other shelters. Water supply and sanitation had to be improvised, as also community kitchens and medical services to prevent the outbreak of malaria and cholera. Overseeing all of this was Pran Luthra, former adviser, NEFA, and his wife, Indira, who did a splendid job with a patience, tenacity and thoroughness that inspired confidence.

The UN was soon seized of the matter. A Belgian resolution to get the Security Council to focus on averting an Indo-Pakistan war mixed cause and consequence. By now a sixth of East Pakistan's population or around ten million refugees had fled to India. Barring the Soviet Union, no great power was willing to focus on Pakistan's huge internal problem, which had been created by Yahya Khan and Bhutto. The Indian position had, by now, imperceptibly moved from reiterating that the refugees must go home to stating that an independent Bangladesh alone would allow this to happen. Yahya Khan remained intransigent.

Pakistan declared war on 3 December 1971 with a preemptive air strike on a number of Indian military airfields and radar installations on the Western sector and a simultaneous ground offensive from Poonch to Sulaimanke. In a broadcast to his people, Yayha asserted that this would be a 'final war' against India. The tone was shrill and replete with mediaeval religious fanaticism. Mrs Gandhi broadcast to the nation at midnight. The orders given to the Indian Army were defined

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by the Eastern Army commander, Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, as creating conditions for the formation of a representative government in Dacca. The Indian Army moved into East Pakistan in concert with the Mukti Bahini under his overall command.

The Security Council went into session with a self-serving American resolution calling for a simple ceasefire, withdrawal of forces and the policing of the borders by UN observers. Was the Mukti Bahini to withdraw from its own country? The core issues were left dangerously untouched and the resolution was, not unexpectedly, vetoed by the Soviet Union. Britain and France abstained, while the new Chinese representative asked rhetorically whether India planned to invade China because of the presence of Tibetan refugees on its soil.

India formally recognised Bangladesh a few days later, Mrs Gandhi echoing Jefferson's words that this was supported by 'the will of the nation, substantially expressed'. The emergence of Bangladesh demolished the two-nation theory.

The Mukti Bahini had already liberated large tracts of interior Bangladesh and India's main battle thus far had been at sea and in the air. The Indian Navy was in the forefront, blockading Karachi and also sinking a Pakistani submarine in the Bay of Bengal. The establishment of an Eastern Fleet based in Vishakapatnam had only months earlier formally given India a two-ocean Navy. The aircraft carrier INS *Vikrant* battered Chittagong and Cox Bazar, closing both harbours. In the air, the IAF established complete mastery over East Pakistan skies, its audacious little HAL-built Gnats stinging Pakistan's Sabres and F-4 Starfighters.

Much has been written about the Indian strategy. Pakistan's Lieutenant General Niazi had established a series of strong points in major cities and junctions. Lieutenant General Jacob, Chief of Staff at India's Eastern Army Headquarters, planned to bypass these and advance to Dacca, the supreme political and military objective, whose fall would end the war. This was brilliantly achieved by Indian commanders advancing from all sides, outflanking Pakistan's prepared defences, which then crumbled in confusion. Niazi tried to parley, but the then Chief of Army Staff, Sam Manekshaw, firmly told him that his forces had no option but to surrender or face destruction. He was promised honourable terms and a complete guarantee of safety.

Apart from threatening to cut off aid to India, the US was in secret negotiations with China, urging it to attack India. This was to be graphically revealed in Kissinger's *Personal Diaries*, later published by Seymour Hersh to the former's acute embarrassment.

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Commenting on India's war aims, the *HT* said these encompassed the establishment of a sovereign Bangladesh, the return of Bangla refugees in India, and the withdrawal of Pakistani civil and military personnel to West Pakistan under safe conduct. Turning to West Pakistan, we stated that India had no territorial ambitions, but that any withdrawals there could only be to the international frontier and not to the ceasefire line in J&K, as in 1965, when we gave up strategic gains at Haji Pir and the Kargil heights, which were subsequently used by Pakistan to harass us. Though the two-nation theory had been dramatically shattered, India did not seek to dismember Pakistan, but wished to live in peace with it within a cooperative South Asian framework.

Against this background, we described the totally unrealistic and biased UN General Assembly resolution adopted with 104 affirmative votes as 'an act of international piety'. What did the UN do in the face of the migration to India of ten million refugees, 'a number larger than the population of more than two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly'?

Most members, however, were troubled by the dismemberment of a state at a time when many nations confronted unstable and uncertain situations with restive ethnic minorities, secessionist movements and reluctant colonies. Nearer home, Bhutto ranted about a 'thousand year war' with India while Pakistan Radio indulged in the crudest kind of communal fulminations.

The UN vote had other lessons. It exposed the hollowness of non-alignment and revealed the shallowness of its professed principles. It also called attention to the need for a review of India's foreign relations, including its ties with Israel. We argued that the US was 'on the wrong side of history', upholding a brutal, genocidal dictator against the democratic urges of his own people. It had hyphenated India and Pakistan (and so had we, alas) and was out to 'balance' the two, while encouraging China to play the role of referee in view of its own strategic interests in South Asia. The saving grace was that large sections of the American people thought otherwise. Ironically, the twenty-third anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights was celebrated without a formal record of concern over the horrors witnessed in Bangladesh. Bob Hope, the great American comedian, was right to add 'Freedom from Humbug' to Truman's famous Four Freedoms! That Fifth Freedom remains an elusive ideal.

Bhutto's secret weapon, Chinese intervention, did not materialise. Nor was India deterred by the American decision to move its Seventh Fleet, led by the nuclear-armed USS *Enterprise*, from the Pacific to the

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Indian Ocean. It steamed towards Chittagong ostensibly to evacuate stranded American and other foreign personnel, and even the beleaguered Pakistani forces. Our Calcutta correspondent, N.C. Menon, actually filed a story on the US Seventh Fleet's movements, presumably based on reliable Eastern Army Command sources, but I said it should not be carried in the absence of more authoritative confirmation, which we could not get in Delhi. I later kicked myself on spiking a major scoop. Further reflection, however, convinced me that I had acted prudently as tensions were high and it was necessary to avoid reports that could cause alarm and panic.

Niazi surrendered to General Aurora two days later, on 16 December, after a pinpoint IAF rocket attack on his secret headquarters in Dacca convinced him that the game was up. The war in the eastern theatre was over.

'Mujibnagar' moved to Dacca and refugees started streaming back to whatever was left of their shattered homes, but not before the Pakistanis had ordered a savage and systematic carnage of the flower of Bangladesh's intellectual and cultural elite in the capital. Mujib was 'released' and then 'freed' in West Pakistan (where he had been incarcerated), in the first week of 1972, and finally repatriated. He returned home via London and Delhi, where he received a hero's welcome. The map of South Asia had changed. Mrs Gandhi was triumphant and in popular imagination the country's Iron Lady was crowned Empress of India.

The revelations made by the American columnist, Jack Anderson, showed how Yahya's war had become Nixon's war. His copious excerpts from the secret minutes of the so-called Washington Special Action Group operating under the President's personal directions reveal astonishing mala fides. Kissinger is quoted as saying 'we are not trying to be even-handed'. As early as 3 December, the opening day of Pakistan's offensive against India, he complained at a strategy session that he was 'getting hell every half hour' from the President for 'not being tough enough on India'.

Efforts were made clandestinely to transfer to Pakistan US arms already delivered to Jordan. The purpose of ordering the Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal was to divert the attention of the Indian Navy and IAF from East Pakistan. The record shows that Nixon consistently lied to his own people and the world. The 'tilt' extended to the US administration not relaying Niazi's surrender offer to the Government of India for a whole twenty-four hours, while Bangladeshi intellectuals were being massacred. Even as late as February 1972, Nixon's foreign

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policy report to Congress was no more than an apologia for Pakistan, castigating India and alluding to 'convincing evidence', never disclosed, that it intended to dismember West Pakistan. He talked darkly of the implications of the Indo-Pakistan war for 'Great Power relations', chastised the Soviet Union for its support to India and for exploiting super-power détente for the strategic expansion of its own power, and hinting at 'legitimate' Great Power (read Chinese) interests in the region.

My own views on the aftermath were recorded in a series of articles in the *HT* based on a ten-day visit to Pakistan, including an interview with Bhutto in Rawalpindi.*

I thought there was a solid basis for a new beginning, with both Bangladesh and Pakistan assuming a new and positive identity, buttressed by new democratic undercurrents that would facilitate peace and regional cooperation. Events were, regrettably, to prove otherwise.

*

There were many loose ends to be tied up in the aftermath of Bangladesh's liberation, and this was largely accomplished during the two visits that Mujibur Rahman made to Delhi and Calcutta, within weeks of his return home. India promised every assistance in relief, rehabilitation, restoration of infrastructure, helping out with critical manpower and a measure of assistance with the country's security until the new regime could find its feet. It was agreed that the remaining refugees should return to their homes in Bangladesh, but Mrs Gandhi accepted Mujib's plea that only those who had entered India after 26 March 1971, when Bangladesh was proclaimed, should be treated as Bangladeshis, all earlier migrants being counted as Pakistanis. Thus India accepted a burden of past infiltration as a gesture of goodwill. It was also agreed that until their future was jointly negotiated with Islamabad, the Pakistani POWs would be moved to suitable locations in India.

A twenty-five-year Indo-Bangla Treaty of Peace, which covered trade, transit and payments, was signed in March 1972. A Joint Rivers Commission was established and set out immediately to see how best to tame the Barak, which floods both Cachar and Sylhet. A month later, both sides agreed to consider joint cooperation to exploit the huge potential of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin and establish

*These were brought together and, with some additions, published as *An End to Confrontation* (Delhi: S. Chand and Co, 1972).

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a joint power grid. The proposals had found resonance at an Indo-Nepal meeting where a preliminary understanding had been reached on harnessing the Karnali and Mahakali Rivers for the benefit of the region.

With the Farakka Barrage moving towards completion, Bangladesh expressed concern about the possible adverse impact from the diversion of flows to the Bhagirathi-Hooghly to flush Calcutta port. The matter was accordingly remitted to the JRC. Early the following year, India assured Bangladesh that the Farakka project would not become operational until a water-sharing agreement had been worked out. Dacca in turn was amenable to granting India transit facilities to the North-east. Fortunately, an interim accord on sharing the Ganga waters at Farakka was reached in April 1975.

Meanwhile, Bhutto was busy trying to stabilise his position. Unable to provide his traumatised countrymen bread he offered them a circus, first calling for a Security Council meeting to prevent an Indian 'threat' to the ceasefire and then stomping out of the Commonwealth following the recognition of Bangladesh by the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Then, in a typically theatrical turnaround, he told Indian newsmen a few months later that he had decided to abandon confrontation with India and, having failed to resolve the Kashmir issue by military means, was reconciled to the fact that the struggle for self-determination could not be inspired from outside. He went on to express willingness to recognise Bangladesh provided India first released all Pakistani POWs.

He took another step forward by suggesting the possibility of converting the ceasefire line (CFL) into a permanent boundary on the basis of some territorial adjustments such as those discussed with Swaran Singh in 1963, swapping the Indian strip along the eastern bank of the Kishenganga River in exchange for the further Kargil heights then held by Pakistan, together with a soft frontier to permit free cross-border movement. Overcoming some skirmishing along the CFL and an impasse over some small pieces of territory in contention, dates were set for a summit meeting. The resultant Simla Conference opened on 28 June 1972 with D.P. Dhar, Haksar and P.N. Dhar assisting Mrs G, and Aziz Ahmed, Pakistan's most senior civil servant, aiding Bhutto. The *HT* wrote that history had moved on, and there must be a fundamental reappraisal of old positions and an end to confrontation.

Bhutto had few cards, and the talks appeared to have all but broken down on 2 July when he suddenly called on Mrs Gandhi and struck a deal. Bhutto pleaded for India's understanding and support in helping him stabilise democracy in Pakistan, by not appearing to be dictating terms to a defeated enemy. Mrs Gandhi concurred. She, however, said

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the CFL should be re-designated the line of control, a political rather than a military divide, which could, in due course, be endowed with the characteristics of an international border by locating customs and immigration posts along a soft frontier.

This understanding was not spelt out in words. Instead, what was formally stated was that a 'final settlement' of the J&K question would be negotiated bilaterally and through peaceful means. The compact rested on trust and what Indira Gandhi regarded as Bhutto's word of honour. Unfortunately, Bhutto did not live up to his word, and not for the first time.* Critics in India were bitter that the country had thrown away a great victory.

Bhutto ran into trouble in Pakistan over the Simla Agreement and, within months, three senior ministers resigned. The Peoples Party of Pakistan had won the elections on the platform of a parliamentary federal system with the promise of a considerable devolution of power. He was now working to establish a centralised presidential system, assuming large powers to himself. He returned to his intransigent, belligerent ways, delaying recognition of Bangladesh, which he insisted on calling 'Muslim Bengal', and refusing to take back the Urdu-speaking Bihari Muslims, who had fought for Pakistan during the Bangladesh liberation struggle, and holding hostage in Pakistan some four lakh Bangladeshis—civil servants, military personnel and professionals—who had been trapped in the west wing. He had already determined to restore Pakistan's military as 'the finest fighting machine in Asia' and to set the country on the road to nuclear capability, even if funding such an enterprise meant that Pakistanis would have to 'eat grass'.

*

Back home, the country prepared for a mini general election in March 1972, with some eleven states going to the polls. Abdullah's externment order was extended and the Plebiscite Front barred from contesting the polls, a policy the *HT* criticised. We argued that the J&K problem was now primarily internal rather than external and it would be unwise to alienate a new generation of Kashmiris. Nobody seemed to be listening and we smelt danger in resurrecting the Kashmir question when it seemed all but buried. The March polls gave the Congress (I) a landslide

*Ayub's information secretary and biographer, Altaf Gauhar, was later to write in 1995 that Bhutto had shown 'diplomatic artistry of the highest order', compelling P.N. Dhar to expose the perfidy and set the record straight in a series of articles in *The Times of India*.

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victory in many states, its gains being made at the cost of both the Left and Right.

The Election Commission proposed certain electoral reforms in the light of the experience gained, and recommended lowering the voting age to eighteen, a reform that had to wait a further decade for implementation.

Elsewhere, there were several crucial developments. The badly eroded ravines along the Chambal, Betwa and Yamuna rivers in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and UP had left the people impoverished. Some of them took to dacoity as a way of life, playing Robin Hood on the side. The problem assumed menacing proportions with the armed gangs infesting the ravine badlands getting embroiled in gang wars, caste conflicts and vendetta.

Vinoba Bhave, earlier, and then JP had turned their attention to this social menace and sought to reform the dacoits through an honourable surrender and rehabilitation package that would not do violence to the rule of law. Patient negotiations yielded results. The first of a series of mass surrenders took place in April 1972, with Madho Singh, a dreaded dacoit, and his gang laying down arms. Others followed, including the woman dacoit, Phoolan Devi, who was later elected to the Assembly and was also the subject of a controversial film.

Ceylon became Sri Lanka. Charu Mazumdar, the CPI-ML leader was arrested, as were some of his leading colleagues, resulting in a splintering of the party with certain elements abandoning the nihilistic path of class annihilation. The Bombay Doordarshan Kendra was opened and a number of other kendras followed in Srinagar, Amritsar, Madras, Calcutta, Lucknow and Kanpur, within eighteen months. Indian television was on its way. Meanwhile the DMK split, with M.G. Ramachandran forming the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). And in Assam, linguistic riots took a disturbing Assamese-versus-Bengali turn.

There was, however, an auspicious start to 1973. The signing of the Paris Agreement brought the long and bitter Vietnam War to an end. But West Asia remained tense. Pakistan's national Assembly adopted a new constitution which defined the territorial limits of the state, thus enabling Bhutto, finally, to recognise Bangladesh.

The ensuing months were dominated by moves towards rapprochement in J&K, and the manoeuvres leading to India's absorption of Sikkim. The supersession of three judges in naming A.N. Ray as the next Chief Justice of India and the call by Shashi Bhushan, a senior Congressman, for 'limited dictatorship' to harness discipline with

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democracy in order to tackle mounting corruption, black money and urban and rural land grabbing were intimations of what was to follow. The Supreme Court delivered its Keshavananda judgment on the validity of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth amendments which restored Parliament's power to amend any and every article provided that no amendment had the effect of 'emasculating' its 'basic structure'. This has since been the shield and anchor of the Constitution.

The thaw in J&K that commenced with talks between G. Parthasarathi and Mirza Afzal Beg moved forward desultorily. A year later, Swaran Singh and Sheikh Abdullah had got to the point of discussing the degree of autonomy that the state might enjoy. The fear in Delhi was that nothing should be done which would affect the integrity of India and trigger a domino effect. I argued that the integrity of India was unaffected by Article 370, which only governed Centre-state relations between J&K and the Union. The critical article that indissolubly binds the state to India is Article 1. This, read with Schedule 1, defines the territories of the Union. By this token, J&K is as much an integral part of India as Bihar or Madhya Pradesh. The quantum of autonomy, however, was negotiable and was essentially 'a matter of trust'. The discussions progressed slowly and finally bore fruit in 1975.

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The developments in Sikkim were more disturbing. It was not part of India but linked to it through treaty relations. With the lapse of paramountcy in 1947, Sikkim became an Indian protectorate with both Pakistan and Tibet preferring certain claims on it. The Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950 vested India with direct responsibility for its defence, external relations, communications and customs. For the rest, the state was to enjoy internal autonomy 'subject to the ultimate responsibility of the Government of India for the maintenance of good administration and of law and order'. An Indian civil servant was named dewan and residuary powers vested in an Indian political officer.

In practice, the authority of both the dewan and political officer were gradually eroded and the maharaja emerged as the centre of power in Gangtok. The indigenous Bhutia-Lepcha Buddhists of Tibetan stock enjoyed 'state subject' rights but had, over the years, been outnumbered by Hindu Nepalese who had been first brought in by the British. The dilemma that soon confronted India was how to balance indigenous ethnic rights against the weight of Nepalese numbers in a democratic milieu. A difficult situation was rendered more delicate by events in

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Tibet, Nepal and East Pakistan. Sikkim was geo-politically positioned between all three and the Darjeeling Hills and Siliguri neck, largely inhabited by Nepalese Indians to the south.

With the demise of the old maharaja, the ruler or Chogyal came up against increasing demands for electoral reform from the Nepalese population which felt politically constrained by a system weighted in favour of the Bhutia-Lepcha ethnic minority. The clamour for 'one man one vote' intensified in 1973, bringing the Chogyal to Delhi. In the event, a tripartite agreement was worked out enlarging the Assembly but balancing the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalese with sixteen seats each, in the interests of ethnic harmony. The Nepali-oriented Sikkim Congress, with some Bhutia-Lepchas in its ranks, coasted to an electoral victory under the new dispensation.

The Nepalese wanted to shake off Bhutia-Lepcha hegemony and, within months, the Sikkim Congress started agitating for ratification of what it claimed was a new constitution embodied in the Government of Sikkim Bill, which the Chogyal maintained was only a resolution that required fuller consideration. The Sikkim Congress drew attention to language that spoke of seeking 'representation' in the Indian Parliament, whereas the Bhutia-Lepchas chafed at what they saw as an erosion of Sikkim's autonomy and identity.

The Chogyal too was inclined to be a trifle headstrong and, being married to an American, Hope Cooke, who assumed the title of Gyalmo, believed he could muster sufficient backing to get his principality a status akin to that of Bhutan. The Chinese issued a provocative statement citing 'Sikkim's demand for national independence' and charging India with designs to 'fully control and annex Sikkim'. The Sikkim Congress then followed up with a letter urging the Government of India to 'take all necessary steps' to enable Sikkim to be represented in the Indian Parliament. The *HT* warned against any 'shotgun marriage'. But a course had been set and there was a certain inevitability about what followed.

In the last week of August, the Indian Parliament, with scarcely any discussion or explanation, adopted a bizarre constitution amendment bill making Sikkim an 'associate state of India', basically transforming an unsuspecting country from a union of states to some kind of confederation. All this in two half-hours or less. While most commentators were elated by or acquiescent with regard to this shabby transaction, *The Statesman*, under Sunanda Datta Ray, and *The Hindustan Times* expressed disapproval and outrage. Readers of the *HT*, on 30 August 1973 awoke to read a powerful editorial captioned 'Kanchenjunga,

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Here We Come' that reverberated throughout the country as well as in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. We pulled no punches:

> If it is not outright annexation, it comes close to it. To suggest anything less would be self-deception and compounding dishonesty with folly. Sikkim is to be reduced from a protectorate to a colony through nominal representation in the Indian Parliament. To what end? What deep-seated urge of the Sikkimese people is this intended to satisfy? What will (the proposed) two Sikkimese observers in either House do? Will they vote? And will their 'representation' entitle the Indian Parliament to debate and discuss any and every aspect of the governance of Sikkim? If it does, then what happens to the separate 'identity' and 'personality' of Sikkim? If it does not then what purpose from the Indian side does Sikkimese 'representation' serve, unless it be a thin cover for genteel annexation without representation—to be followed by (formal) annexation later if necessary. Elsewhere, protectorates are graduating to independence and colonies are marching to freedom. In Sikkim, a protectorate is moving to 'freedom within India' by annexation through constitutional legerdemain.
>
> The worst suspicions about the manner in which the protector has seduced his helpless and inoffensive ward, with some genuine and much synthetic drama, will now find confirmation. No country or people voluntarily choose self-effacement, and the Indian Government is not going to be able to persuade the world that Sikkim's 'annexation' to India represents the will of the Sikkimese people. Indeed, this issue has never been placed before them. It was not the basis of, nor did it ever have any remote connection with, the movement against the Chogyal, which was aimed at democratisation of the local administration. Nor was it subsequently an election issue. The reference to Sikkim's desire for closer political association with India was written into the recent Government of Sikkim Act, drafted with Indian assistance, under Indian supervision and, who can blame the critic for assuming, possibly not without some little Indian blandishments or tutoring.

We noted the extraordinary haste with which such a fundamental change in the structure of the Indian constitution was effected without any consultation, and dismissed the so-called security considerations as far-fetched as this aspect was already and always in Indian hands.

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We concluded:

> The crusading zeal and decisiveness the Government has displayed over Sikkim has not been available for tackling far more urgent problems and mounting crises at home. Perhaps no need for the common man to ask for bread. He's getting Sikkim.

The 36th Amendment Bill introduced in Parliament a few days later explained and justified nothing. The patent dishonesty of the transaction was evidenced by the fact that the Sikkim Assembly was said to have resolved on a course of action under a constitution yet to be brought into force. The Bill unilaterally provided that Sikkimese representatives in Parliament would be entitled to vote in all matters except the election of the Indian President and vice president.

> In other words, the vote of a stranger in the House and one who does not owe allegiance to the Indian constitution might determine the fate of a vote of confidence in the Indian Government, or the approval of the budget, or whether Chandigarh should go to Punjab or Haryana . . . The proposition is prima facie absurd.

The sorry story did not end there. By April there was talk of abolishing the monarchy, an 'anachronism', the Chogyal being accused of complicity in a conspiracy to assassinate the chief minister, Kazi Lhendup Dorji. Within two days the Sikkim Assembly adopted a resolution peremptorily stating that 'the institution of Chogyal is hereby abolished and Sikkim shall henceforth be a constituent part of India'. Sikkim determined what India should do! The law should have been allowed to take its course regarding the make-believe charge of the Chogyal's murderous intentions. Instead, the jurisdiction of the Central Court at Gangtok was ousted even before it could take up a suit on its file challenging the validity of the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, as violative of the Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950.

The Sikkim government reacted with another resolution declaring that the Government of Sikkim Act could not be challenged in any court of law, a dodge assisted by the 'interpretative powers' of the Government of India. The Assembly further proposed to hold a 'referendum' two days later to certify the will of the people, even as the Delhi High Court had before it a writ petition questioning the validity of the 35th Amendment granting associate status to Sikkim. The *HT* editorially counselled restraint and a three-way dialogue to arrive at an amicable settlement. Nobody was listening. Within seventy-two hours, Sikkim's

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independent identity had been effaced. We analysed that tragic denouement in 'A Merger is Arranged', which appeared on 17 April 1974:

> If anything has discredited Sikkim's demand for merger with India, it is the so-called referendum which demonstrably could not have been held and completed in a fair and reasonable manner within 72 hours. Sikkim is a mountainous principality with scattered villages and hamlets, not all of them easily accessible. The electorate numbers 97,000 and the ballot papers carrying the Sikkim Assembly's resolution had to be printed in three languages. The fact that the referendum was conducted with such incredible speed must produce scepticism. No time was allowed for any kind of discussion. The question was wrongly put: 'The institution of Chogyal is hereby abolished and Sikkim shall henceforth be a constituent unit of India'. These are two separate issues with no necessary connection. In the Sikkim poll they were linked almost as cause and consequence. The very question posed was sub judice and subject to an injunction in the Central Court of Gangtok. The procedures followed were of questionable constitutional validity. The only justification for all this can be the argument of revolutionary legality. But if the will of the people had to find expression outside and beyond the Assembly, there was no need to diminish its sanctity by staging a mock referendum. And this in the India of Gandhi and Nehru!

The strident charges against the Chogyal included one that he operated a ham radio transmitter after finding that the palace telephones were not working! And what was to happen to the Chogyal? None knew. Few cared. A sadly pusillanimous Indian press was supine. Mrs Gandhi had unleashed a pseudo-radical jingoism that cared little for deeper values. She had begun talking of external threats and was firm in not lifting the 1971 emergency. The Chogyal continued to reside in Gangtok, virtually under house arrest (for his own safety, it was said) but visited Kathmandu in March 1975 on the occasion of King Birendra's coronation. He met almost all the dignitaries present, demanding a fair and free referendum in Sikkim without seeking any special position for himself. The Government of India disapproved of his efforts to 'internationalise' the issue. A subsequent effort by a Sikkim minister, K.C. Pradhan, to promote a rapprochement through dialogue was aborted. Pradhan was fired. The Chogyal died of cancer in 1982, a broken man, his estranged wife having returned to America . . . a sorry ending of a sad story.

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There were anti-Indian demonstrations in Nepal over the Sikkim issue and disquiet in Bhutan. It was a deplorable episode and wholly avoidable. It did not represent India's most glorious hour. The *HT*'s stance on Sikkim was acutely embarrassing for the government; but there was no effort to contradict anything we had said, apart from some private tut-tutting. Nor was there any explanation as to why any relevant geo-political goals the government may have had in mind could not have been largely achieved through consultation and dialogue.

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Elsewhere, an emergency was declared in Bangladesh on account of mounting political violence, smuggling, and economic troubles. This was a prelude to Mujib's assumption of almost total powers under a populist and scarcely liberal one-party dispensation. Iran and Iraq signed an accord after years of bloody fighting. Cambodia was taken over by the Khmer Rouge whose bloodlust under Pol Pot appalled the world. Nixon was impeached and resigned in disgrace.

At home, the G.D. Khosla Inquiry Commission report more or less laid to rest the ghost of Netaji Bose, who had been killed in an air crash towards the end of the Second World War. But interested politicians had sought strenuously to keep him alive, reporting mysterious sightings and dark hints from sources which were never identified. Dev Kant Barooah became the Congress president. Mrs Gandhi described AIR as the government's voice. A DMK-appointed committee under Justice Rajamannar recommended, and the Madras Assembly resolved, that India be converted into a confederation of states, the Union being entrusted with responsibility for no more than defence, foreign policy, inter-state communications and currency. The report of the Committee on the Status of Women was presented in Parliament. This brought together a mass of researched material that, for the first time, systematically portrayed the measure of deprivation Indian women endure in a variety of individual and social circumstances. The report called for reform through a transformation of the attitudes of both men and women, so as to overcome notions of male superiority and the tradition of female acquiescence.

The first signs of demographic change in India were reported from Kerala where the birth-rate started declining, leaving many pre-primary schools without toddlers to teach. The country's first earth satellite, Aryabhatta, went into orbit. At the same time, an official report confirmed that bonded labour continued to flourish in at least half-a-dozen states, with the victims leading virtually enslaved lives. The Maharashtra

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government, concerned about Bombay's runaway growth, set up a committee to report on whether work-permits should be introduced to regulate entry into the city.

Possibly the most notable event in India in 1974 was the country's first nuclear explosion at Pokhran on 18 May, which was announced with an enigmatically encoded message that 'the Buddha had smiled'. There was a surge of pride throughout the country and tributes were paid to the scientists who had worked on the project. The *HT* wrote editorially that 'a nuclear bang, albeit peaceful, means little without a corresponding release of economic and political energy. It should promote not chauvinism but constructive purpose, not false notions of power but a redoubled effort to build a better India'. Pakistan was livid, and Bhutto protested that India had destroyed the military balance. Japan, Canada and others expressed pain and sought to review aid policies to a country that had diverted scarce resources to build a bomb. India had violated no international protocols as it was not a signatory to the NPT, which it had labelled discriminatory. Nevertheless, sanctions followed, extending to trade.

India made it clear that it was not in the business of cultivating mushroom clouds. But other clouds had begun to darken the horizon.

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7

A LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO THE NIGHT

By 1974, Mrs Gandhi was riding high but found herself increasingly mired in a political and ethical bog of her own creation. Rather than extricate herself, she turned away from proven advisers to embrace a coterie that flattered her ego and fed on her inchoate fears, for their own self-aggrandisement. Emerging out of the shadows and soon to lead the pack was her younger son, Sanjay, lately returned from the UK where he had failed to complete a student apprenticeship with Rolls Royce and a course in mechanical engineering for which he had enrolled.

The country was plunged in disorder and violence and there was a stench of corruption in the air. The Gujarat agitation against the Congress chief minister Chimanbhai Patel was symptomatic of a wider malaise. The rot had started earlier in UP which, by virtue of its size, was seen as holding the key to power in Delhi.

The UP Assembly had been dissolved in July 1973 but restored months later under a Congress (I) ministry led by H.N. Bahuguna. Fresh elections were soon due and Mrs Gandhi was determined to win. She made the astonishing claim that UP had been deliberately kept backward since British times and that only now was it progressing with her benign support. She portrayed herself as the font and giver of good things, and undertook whirlwind tours of UP every weekend by IAF helicopters or other official aircraft to lay the foundation stone for a vast number of projects. These clearly were sweeteners to woo the electorate. Schemes were hurriedly put together, included in the Fifth Plan and approved in

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order to keep this gravy train moving.*

The projects 'inaugurated' by Mrs Gandhi, the foundations laid, the largesse bestowed, and the enhanced allocations announced of controlled commodities to UP, were staggering. They ranged from bridges, new railway lines and new universities to fertiliser and nuclear power plants, housing schemes, subsidies, new electricity connections, irrigation projects, new welfare funds, pension schemes and a host of other goodies. Some were ongoing schemes, others interlopers and some quite outside the compass of the Plan. We termed this UP's new Golden Age, with gifts pouring in from an empty exchequer and in defiance of Plan priorities. The distinction between party and state was obliterated.

JP expressed concern as did Atal Behari Vajpayee who drew attention to a Supreme Court ruling that election-eve munificence was an 'evil practice' bordering on 'corrupt practice'.

Elections require money, so the floodgates of corruption were opened to fill the party coffers. Mrs Gandhi had nationalised many industries and services. She now 'nationalised' corruption. Earlier, fund-raising had been left to the party satraps, the Syndicate, organisation men. In consequence, they had become a powerful cabal. Now they were in the other camp after the Congress split. Mrs Gandhi decided to take charge. The vast patronage the central government enjoyed in a permit-licence raj, not to mention foreign supply and purchase contracts, offered hitherto undreamt of opportunities for private and party gain. Fund collection became a central project.

There were now new priorities. The continuing ban on company donations to political parties merely encouraged illicit, black-money transactions. Chimanbhai Patel was charged with squeezing twenty-five lakh rupees for the Congress electoral chest in Gujarat from the oilseeds trade, the burden being passed on to the public. The outcry that ensued brought about his downfall. The *HT* commented editorially that even if the Congress did not have a monopoly in milking company donations, it had certainly become a 'dominant undertaking' in the matter, through a mix of official pressure and blandishments.

The PM protested that the phenomenon of corruption was being exaggerated and that it was 'a global phenomenon'. Shortly thereafter, the minister of state for finance, K.R. Ganesh, told Parliament, with

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*I wrote about this in *The Hindustan Times*, with inputs from our correspondents. The two long articles that appeared in the *HT* in February 1974 were titled 'Foundations of Electoral Success' and 'Some Precious Stones', the latter being a critical examination of some of these projects.

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some alarm, that that a vast parallel economy was being run by the three 'smuggling kings of India', presumably Sukar Narain Bakhia, Yusuf Patel and Haji Mastan, using high-speed craft operating from the Gulf. It was widely alleged, without challenge, that the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was not being amended, as strongly recommended, as such gangsters appeared to enjoy political protection as a quid pro quo for services rendered. Such an amendment did, however, follow and Yusuf Patel was nabbed, causing President Giri to observe that this could well have been done three or four years earlier.

Another scandal was soon to follow. A memorandum apparently sponsored by a Congress MP, Tulmohan Ram, in 1973, supported by the forged signatures of seventeen other MPs, sought the grant of certain import licences to some Pondicherry traders. Fingers were pointed at L.N. Mishra, then commerce minister, for showing undue interest in the expeditious clearance of these applications as part of a racket by middlemen who would subsequently sell the licences they procured to bigger players for a consideration.

Demands for a parliamentary inquiry were turned down. Mrs Gandhi was totally insensitive to the political and ethical implications of the scandal, and hinted darkly of 'witch hunts'. A delayed CBI inquiry established Tulmohan Ram's complicity. He was arrested with some others, leaving the Congress leadership strangely unconcerned despite reported findings of money having passed hands and file notings by Mishra urging prompt disposal of the licence applications. Cornered, Mishra, then the railway minister, did not come clean in the House, where the government kept stonewalling. It was now November, and other developments would soon sweep such 'trifles' out of public consciousness as larger crises unfolded.

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Poor labour relations had long been a bane of industry, with the politicisation of unions and the entry of external white-collar leadership in blue-collar enterprises. Major strikes in Indian Airlines and the insurance sector had caused some turbulence earlier. But now the All-India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) threatened a strike, with effect from May 1974, on a raft of eight demands hinging on the payment of bonus and parity of wages with other public sector units.

With minor demands conceded and negotiations underway on the rest, the railwaymen should have heeded the appeal of President Giri, himself an old railway labour leader, to desist from an extreme course at a difficult time. The government, however, did not help matters by

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arresting George Fernandes, the AIRF president, even as negotiations were moving forward. Mishra told Parliament that this had become necessary because Fernandes had, ten days earlier, threatened to torch railway assets, stop the movement of trains and bring the economy to a standstill, defying any territorial army or military intervention to break the strike.

The underlying political motivation was to hit back at the government where it hurt. Fortunately, the railwaymen called off the strike unconditionally on the twentieth day after it had been substantially broken. What was needed, apart from a settlement of the residual demands, was a clearly framed wages-prices-profits policy and concepts of productivity in which workers could legitimately claim a larger share of a growing pie, but this did not happen. The railway strike was over but it left behind a trail of bitterness as the railwaymen had suffered.

Gujarat, meanwhile, had been caught in a crisis of rising prices, food procurement and mounting corruption. The manner in which the previous chief minister, Ghanshyam Oza, had been supplanted by Chimanbhai Patel divided the party. Factionalism impeded good governance. Despite mounting disorder, Chimanbhai remained obdurate and resisted pressures from his own party and from others to quit. Defiant street mobs turned violent, and police firing resulted in thirty-seven deaths. The Army was called out and the demand for President's Rule grew louder. The Centre seemed impervious to what was happening. In his Independence Day address, the President described the prevailing situation in the country as 'an invitation to chaos'.

Chimanbhai, forced out of office, recommended President's Rule without dissolution of the Assembly, in a bid to come back later. This further incensed public opinion. Some Congress MLAs resigned as Chimanbhai refused even to summon a meeting of the Congress legislature party. JP was invited to Gujarat and called on the other MLAs to resign to force the dissolution of the Assembly and fresh elections. The Congress High Command finally expelled Chimanbhai for failing to step down from the leadership of the state unit. The total breakdown of the political process compelled Morarji Desai to resort to an indefinite fast, in March 1974, to counter the deplorable violence, arson and intimidation to which the state had been witness, as much as against the obduracy of the Centre whose wooden attitude had fuelled the agitation.

Two demands remained: an inquiry into the corruption charges and fresh elections. The government's continuing failure to order fresh elections, possibly for fear of its impact on the forthcoming UP polls, led

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Morarji to go on a second fast, almost a year later in March 1975. The government's plea that it first needed to tackle the drought convinced few. Mrs Gandhi gave in, and said elections would be held by June.

The non-Congress Janata Front, composed of most opposition parties with CPM support and cemented by the anti-Congress agitation, was now compelled to hone its strategy for fighting the elections. Morarji found it difficult to forge a consensus. The formation of a new regional party, the Kisan Mazdoor Lok Paksh (KMLP), by Chimanbhai Patel implied three-cornered contests in several constituencies. The campaign turned violent. Mrs G, Jagjivan Ram and V.C. Shukla were stoned. Charges flew. Chimanbhai admitted that he had, indeed, collected twenty-five lakh rupees from oilseeds merchants for Mrs Gandhi's UP election chest. The charge was vehemently denied but more accusations were traded.

The elections were held and poll results were declared on 14 June. It was a fractured verdict. The Janata Front led; the Congress came second and the KLMP (with some independents) held the balance. Chimanbhai was defeated, thus clearing the way for a Janata-KLMP alliance. The KLMP pledged unconditional support to the Janata Front and its leader, Babubhai Jashabhai Patel, was sworn in as chief minister.

Preceding the turmoil in Gujarat and running parallel to it thereafter was a larger and more volatile crisis, in Bihar, where misgovernment, factionalism and corruption had attained alarming proportions. Rising public anger brought rowdies out on the streets and there were bids to topple the government. Yet there was no explanation for the riotous scenes in Patna, in March 1974, when mobs vandalised the offices of the two leading newspaper groups, the *Searchlight/Pradeep* (in which the offices of the *HT* were also located) and *The Indian Nation*, and attempted to set them on fire. The police did not intervene on the ground that all available forces had been deployed to protect the Assembly.

The disturbances spread to Monghyr and other places, and curfew had to be imposed in Patna. Speaking some days later, L.N. Mishra, patron of the ministerial group in the state, ruled out any inquiry into the violent incidents in Bihar which, he claimed, were engineered by some parties with the assistance of 'foreign elements'.

Speculation about ministerial changes did little to assuage public doubts and voices rose demanding President's Rule. Resentment was heightened by the government's next move, which was to delist the *Searchlight* and *Pradeep*, depriving them of government advertisements, without a word of explanation. The grapevine had it that some influential politicians and bureaucrats were unhappy at *Searchlight*'s persistent

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reporting of matters they preferred to keep under wraps, including Chief Minister Ghafoor's by-election victory in Madhubani after trains and road transport services in the area were mysteriously suspended on the day of the poll. The matter went to the Press Council, which the state government tried to block through a court action on the ground that it was being stampeded by hasty proceedings. The plaint was thrown out by the Delhi High Court, and the appeal fared no better in the Supreme Court.

The Congress (I) working committee, however, indicted the RSS, Anand Margis (a rather dubious secret cult) and other unidentified 'forces of right reaction' for seeking to engineer a 'fascist takeover'. JP was indicted for allegedly supporting such extra-parliamentary forces despite the sobering influence he had come to exercise on the Bihar movement. The Congress and CPI's efforts to mobilise opinion through processions encountered opposition from the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, the student/youth formation that drew inspiration from JP. This led to clashes, whereupon JP called on MLAs to resign their seats (on the somewhat strange plea that the state Assembly, elected in 1972, had 'exhausted its mandate'), and allow a spell of President's Rule before fresh elections.

Further incensed by the findings of two Citizen's Inquiry Committees that he had set up to probe the earlier police firings in Gaya and Patna, JP now announced a programme that involved picketing the Assembly, gheraoing the residences of MLAs, a no-tax campaign and, more ominously, a call for disobedience of orders by the police as part of what was shaping into a campaign for 'Total Revolution'.

The *HT* criticised this approach and called for restraint, pointing out that legislatures had a constitutional life and that the demand for electoral reform was independent of anything happening in Bihar. We, however, remained sympathetic to JP's primary aim of combating corruption and seeking electoral reforms, as poll funding was widely perceived as fuelling the black economy. The government's procrastination over appointing a Lok Pal only heightened suspicion that the system was being manipulated for personal and political aggrandisement. A smallpox outbreak that took 10,000 lives in Bihar at this time further pointed to a breakdown in administration.

The downward spiral in Bihar continued. JP had been critical of the poor quality of education, and he now called on students to take a year's 'sabbatical' and join his movement to regenerate the system. Student 'satyagrahis', endeavouring to prevent colleges from reopening after the summer vacation, were tear-gassed in Ranchi, Chapra,

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Darbhanga and Begusarai, while some students were killed in police firing in Jamshedpur. The *HT* feared this could be the road to anarchy.

The Bihar movement entered a new phase with JP upping the ante by deciding to lead his paralyse-the-government satyagraha at the gates of the Patna secretariat. This was coupled with a proposed bid to stop rail movement through the state, which was already suffering from various afflictions including smallpox, flood and drought. As feared, some demonstrators did indulge in sabotage and tampered with the railway tracks despite JP's injunction that the protest be peaceful and non-violent. A revolt against the Ghafoor administration, the arbitrary removal of the newly appointed Lok Ayukta (state ombudsman) for taking his job more seriously than desired, and the Press Council's indictment of the government in the *Searchlight* case swelled the chorus calling for a change of guard in Bihar and President's Rule.

How deep the rot had gone was brought home by the revelation by D.C. Wadhwa, a Pune Professor, that Bihar was under 'Ordinance Raj', and was being governed through successive administrative decrees, by-passing the legislature. Scandalously, a total of 127 ordinances were promulgated in 1973 and 180 in the first 10 months of the following year. Ordinances lapse after six months unless ratified by the legislature. As the legislature was rendered non-functional or crudely side-stepped, lapsing ordinances would be re-promulgated, and three of the executive fiats went back 18 years. This was sheer rape of the Constitution and said something about the character and calibre of the governors who aided and abetted the crime.

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Mrs Gandhi met JP in Delhi. Nothing came of the talks. He was now being propelled by events. Students, youth and the intelligentsia had been totally alienated from the administration, and clutched at his alternative of building from below through a parallel government with wide popular participation, to implement little schemes that could improve their lives. The local unit of the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti called for a total bandh in Delhi on 4 November, which the *HT* described as a pointless provocation.

The Congress response, through a three-day conclave at Narora, UP, proved a damp squib and confirmed that elements in the party had lost touch with reality as they dubbed the demand for fighting corruption and for electoral reform as 'ruses' and the current agitations as being the handiwork of 'fascist' elements. All manner of pro-poor slogans and programmes, long promised but left unimplemented, were dredged up

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again and given a new coat of paint—distribution of housing sites for Harijans (not yet called Dalits), a credit mechanism for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, slum clearance with housing for low-income groups, more scholarships for the poor, and an improved public distribution system targeted at vulnerable groups. Most of these 'crash' programmes had crashed earlier.

The Punjab chief minister, Giani Zail Singh, reportedly proposed that AIR be run, as in China and Pakistan, as a purely official mouthpiece, while the Rajasthan and Orissa CMs wanted curbs on the press. The *HT* noted that even in the Congress Party, warnings had been sounded against the machinations of a small but determined Marxist faction within it. Meanwhile, the CPI national executive outlined a programme for power sharing at the Centre through a reverse Kerala-type alliance where the CPI government under Achutha Menon was propped up by the Congress from outside.

In Bihar, the new tactic adopted by the regime was to imprison potentially troublesome opponents. Thus Nanaji Deshmukh (Jana Sangh), Madhu Limaye (Socialist), Sarla Bhadoria, Raj Narain (Congress-O) and Siddharaj Dhadda (Sarvodaya leader) were jailed and, in some cases, 'escorted' out of Bihar. Nanaji Deshmukh challenged the still continuing 1971 Emergency on the ground that his externment had been ordered under the Defence of India Rules (DIR) that had been promulgated then.

In its defence, the government filed an affidavit arguing that the promulgation or continuance of the Emergency was not liable to trial in a court of justice. It also rejected the allegation that the prime minister had shifted the grounds of the Emergency. This was with reference to a statement she had made at the Foreign Correspondents' Association in Delhi, on 15 June, to the effect that 'the Emergency is still on, but it is not a war emergency. An economic Emergency is, however, as serious as a war Emergency'.

Elsewhere, JP had begun to agonise over certain unsavoury trends within the Bihar movement. He announced a temporary suspension of the Jana and Chhatra Sangharsh Samitis in Bihar to facilitate a cleansing of the undesirable elements that had infiltrated them, and were indulging in dubious methods of collecting money and embezzlement.

Things took another dangerous turn, a couple of days into the New Year, with a time bomb exploding under the dais on which L.N. Mishra was seated at a railway function at Samastipur in Bihar, despite earlier warnings that he might come to harm. His wounds were cursorily examined and, amazingly, rather than the minister being evacuated by air, he was made to undertake a long train journey to Patna for further

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treatment of his internal injuries, the seriousness of which had not been properly assessed. This shocking negligence cost him his life. Three weeks after the event, a promised high-level inquiry into the medical aspects of the tragedy was yet to be formally instituted while the criminal investigations proceeded leisurely, even as an orchestrated campaign was mounted and accusing fingers pointed at JP's movement. Scores of 'extremists' were arrested under the MISA and DIR.

The fact is that Mishra had expressed fears for his safety to close friends during the preceding weeks. Of this I have personal evidence, as I knew the minister and his family well. He had spoken of a political conspiracy. And a private detective had informed the Delhi Police, in writing, of a threat to the railway minister's life, naming Samastipur or Darbhanga as probable danger spots. Even so, security arrangements failed, unauthorised persons gained access to the dais, which was dismantled immediately after the event, thus destroying valuable primary evidence. Finally, five weeks later, a commission of inquiry was appointed under Justice Mathew.

The ensuing budget session of the Bihar Assembly got off to a rowdy start with great discourtesy being shown to the governor, and with a large Congress faction baying for Ghafoor's replacement as party leader. The *HT* urged a free election of the new Congress leader rather than the usual imposition of a 'consensual' candidate. In the event, Dr Jagannath Mishra, agriculture minister and L.N. Mishra's younger brother, was elected and sworn in as chief minister.

He began well, releasing students and political prisoners and lifting restrictive regulations, even as JP's Bihar movement set up janata sarkars or grassroots vigilante bodies seeking to awaken people to their rights and responsibilities, but with a hint of being a parallel government in some ways. JP also called for trifurcating Bihar into Chota Nagpur (Jharkhand), North Bihar and the south-west plain. JP's views now found an outlet in *Everyman's Weekly*, an English journal with a Hindi counterpart edited by Ajit Bhattacharjea and Prabhash Joshi, respectively. It was printed at *The Indian Express* press in Delhi and funded by Ramnath Goenka in support of JP's movement, which he virtually underwrote.

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If the news from Bihar was discouraging, there was a glimmer of hope in J&K. The talks between Mirza Afzal Beg, Sheikh Abdullah's principal lieutenant, and G. Parthasarathi, Mrs Gandhi's emissary, finally concluded in a Six-Point Accord that was announced in February 1975.

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Article 370, which regulates Centre-state relations between J&K and the Union, was reaffirmed. Residuary powers were retained by the state, with Parliament remaining empowered to make laws to protect the sovereignty and integrity of India. Constitutional provisions earlier applied to the state with modifications could be altered or repealed on merit if so requested; however, those provisions applied without modification would be unalterable.

The state was given the right to review and propose amendments, or repeal laws made by Parliament and extended to the state after 1953 with regard to matters in the Concurrent List, and the state would be consulted in extending such laws to it in the future. The President's assent would be required for any state legislation or constitutional amendment impinging on the appointment, powers and immunities of the governor; the superintendence, direction and control over elections by the Central Election Commission; eligibility for inclusion in the electoral rolls without discrimination; and the composition of the legislative council. There was, however, disagreement on restoring the nomenclatures Sadr-i-Riyasat and Wazir-e-Azam, though Mrs G subsequently withdrew her objection to the latter through an amendment to the J&K constitution. The accord was an exercise in rebuilding faith between hitherto estranged partners.

At another level, the government tried to drive a wedge between Vinoba Bhave and JP. Mrs Gandhi visited Vinoba at his Paunar ashram, where he was observing a year's maun or silence, and gave him the tidings that the government intended to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the bhoodan movement over a full year, commencing from 18 April 1975, with the distribution of government 'surplus' lands and unallocated bhoodan lands.

Official funds to JP's Bihar bhoodan committee had been stopped some months earlier, and were only partially restored later. Was a wedge being driven between the two Sarvodaya leaders? Evidently so. The Sarvodaya movement of the Sarva Seva Sangh, dedicated to bhoodan and welfare, formally split in March 1975 with twenty out of the twenty-four members of its working committee resigning on the question of JP's movement which focused on planning and development from below.

It had been Gandhi's hope, in 1947, that the Congress would dissolve itself as a political party and continue as a social service movement, devoted especially to the upliftment of Village India. This advice was not heeded, but the Sarva Seva Sangh assumed that role. After twenty-five years, however, the Sarvodaya movement found that it had been

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walking in the wilderness, its voice largely unheard. Now the Gujarat and Bihar movements seemed to have restored their missions in JP's formulation of 'Total Revolution'. Though fuzzy and incompletely thought through, this was a search for a decentralised Gandhian alternative that India had rejected in favour of the Nehru-Mahalanobis model of 'capturing the commanding heights' and hoping for sufficient 'trickle down'. This had not happened as conceived. Vinoba had assumed the role of a recluse and opted out of worldly responsibilities and was on spiritual 'leave' for a year. Yet he and some others close to him felt JP had become 'political' and partisan, and Vinoba himself saw a dose of the 'discipline' he urged, in the Emergency. However, the bulk of the Sarvodaya rank and file went along with JP.

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Life at the *HT* continued with the usual comings and goings. N.S. Jagannathan was now deputy editor and a strong support. K.K. Birla was pleased with the all-round progress of the paper though, I later learnt, unhappy with the Sikkim editorials, which had appeared while he was abroad. He had been cosying up to the Congress and Sanjay Gandhi, and hankered after a Congress parliamentary nomination.

At the time, Sanjay had set out to make a low cost 'people's car', the Maruti, and with many government favours filling his sails had progressed to putting together his 'prototype' in a huge facility in Gurgaon, now occupied by Maruti-Suzuki. There had been a lot of bazaar gossip surrounding the model that Sanjay set out to make, initially in a hired city workshop, with the help of some local mechanics. It was the butt of jokes, and the *HT* avoided reference to what it saw as no more than a young man's effort to realise a dream.

KK was, however, anxious that we write about it and urged me to visit the plant and promised to set up a visit and a meeting with Sanjay. I accordingly spent a whole morning with Sanjay in two partitioned rooms within a vast cavernous shed that could have taken a large assembly line. There were no more than half a dozen 'staff' and workmen around. Sanjay explained the features of the product he had designed and its economics before showing me the contraption he had produced. It was all I could do to prevent myself from laughing. I had spent years looking at and writing about a variety of industrial plants and projects and had some knowledge of work-sites and management practices. What I had been told and shown was plainly a piece of monumental nonsense and revealed a degree of naivety and arrogance that was truly extraordinary. I conveyed my views to K.K. Birla.

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The Sanjay 'Maruti' story was just beginning to unfold and the full extent of the chicanery and underhand pressures officially exercised, and the cravenness and mendacity of the officials and policy makers in high places was to be subsequently revealed in the report of the Maruti Inquiry Commission, appointed by the subsequent Janata government in 1979, under Justice A.C. Gupta.

The commission's report made sad reading, and worse, exposed Mrs Gandhi's complicity in this fraud. Speaking at Ahmedabad on 23 September 1970, as reported by *The Hindustan Times*, the prime minister 'commended the enterprising spirit of her son, Mr Sanjay Gandhi, in putting forward a proposal for a small car that was completely Indian. Mrs Gandhi said she could not say whether a licence would be granted to him. She had been asking all young men to be enterprising even before her son had taken to designing a car. Her son was a delicate young man and with whatever money and energy he had, he had modelled a car, not a posh one, but fairly comfortable and suited to Indian conditions. It would suit the middle class'.

The fact is that at every stage issues were fudged, rules bent, rivals frustrated, records fabricated, officials subjected to pressure or victimised if they refused to comply. Besides, safety norms and standards were compromised and illegalities condoned. The PMO was used to orchestrate efforts to secure an industrial licence for Sanjay's Maruti with an approved capacity of 50,000 units per annum.

The issues of land acquisition, facilities and clearances in Gurgaon were taken care of by the chief minister of Haryana, Bansi Lal, who had become a Sanjay loyalist. The car was to be built completely indigenously, without any utilisation of foreign exchange or foreign technical assistance. Sanjay violated both stipulations. A German designer, Willy Muller, was engaged as technical adviser and brought with him two NSU German engines as 'personal baggage', one of which was fitted into the 'indigenous' prototype when sent for reliability and road worthiness testing to the stipulated agency, the Vehicle Research and Development Establishment (VRDE) of the defence ministry in Ahmednagar. Sanjay, however, got into a running argument with VRDE, seeking more time and departures from agreed conditions.

In the course of further reliability tests at Ahmednagar, Sanjay's prototype suffered a major failure of its steering rod and fell into a ditch. At that time, it had covered 19,376 kilometres as against the stipulated test run of 30,000 kilometres. Yet official efforts were made to say the prototype was all right, but that it was the VRDE's test driver's carelessness that had caused the car to plunge into the ditch. The

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audacity and lies were unbounded. The licence was approved on 25 July 1974.

The Maruti Commission report cites the minister for heavy industry, T.A. Pai's complaint to the prime minister about Sanjay's failure to comply with the requisite test stipulations. Mrs Gandhi said she would speak to Sanjay but this produced no change in the situation. Pai says he spoke to the PM as he did not wish to meet Sanjay who was 'rude' and 'absolutely unreasonable'.

The government was unconcerned about Maruti coming up in a 'prohibited zone' next to an Air Force facility. Some 'remedial measures' were proposed and the file sent to Mrs G. This she kept for four months and then ordered that the matter be kept pending 'for six months or so'. Also, all parliamentary questions about Maruti were seen by Mrs Gandhi and the answers approved by her.

The commission further found that Bansi Lal, facing a revolt in his own ranks and fending off charges framed against him by others, sought insurance by doing Sanjay's bidding, in order to curry the PM's favour. 'It is remarkable that even the report of the panel of ministers inquiring into allegations against Bansi Lal had to be cleared by the prime minister before it was signed by them.'

Maruti's minutes books were cooked up and action sought on the basis of bogus resolutions and alleged bank clearances that were never obtained. Automobile dealers were coerced into buying shares to raise capital for the Maruti venture. The New Delhi Municipal Committee collected share money for Maruti by threatening traders with demolition of their shops. Unaccounted money was used. Maruti Technical Services and Maruti Heavy Vehicles were floated as private companies in which an innocent Sonia Gandhi, then still a foreign national, was made a director. This again was illegal. Banks were coerced to bend regulations and D.V. Taneja, chairman of Central Bank, was hounded and his term not renewed because 'he did not find it possible to approve Sanjay Gandhi's proposal for a loan of Rs 1.5 crores to help Maruti Limited'.

The Maruti Commission's conclusions were damning:

> The affairs of the Maruti concerns described . . . appear to have brought about a decline in the integrity of public life and sullied the purity of administration. Legal and other requirements were brushed aside and accepted norms of behaviour were forgotten . . . There was an atmosphere of fear then prevailing; anything connected with the Maruti concern was looked upon as a 'sensitive matter'. And the fear was real. Threat of detention

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under MISA or a CBI inquiry or other forms of harassment made it hazardous for officers to insist on the rules or dealers and depositors to insist on their rights. Persons in public life were in danger of having their political lives ruined . . .

It seems Shri Sanjay Gandhi was convinced that making . . . applications or writing . . . letters were a mere formality; it was predetermined that all he wanted would be granted to him and in most cases they were. From the interest taken in Maruti's progress by men from the Prime Minister's Secretariat and the way even matters connected with the country's defence were subordinated to the interests of Maruti Ltd, and the sense of fear that promoted implicit obedience, one is left in no doubt as to the origin of the power that made such a state of affairs possible. Shri Sanjay Gandhi exercised only a derivative power, its source was the authority of the Prime Minister.

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The situation was fast deteriorating. Fear, sycophancy and the desire to curry favour in order to seek preferment increasingly made many clamber aboard the bandwagon. But it was also a time to speak out. I wrote two long articles in the *HT* on 24 and 31 March 1974 entitled, 'The Hour of Decision' and 'The Road to Recovery, Gandhi's Truth Recalled'. Like others, I had begun to sense a need to build from below to address the real problems of the people and had started to explore the Gandhian alternative, though I was not fully convinced of JP's theses and his somewhat simplistic formulations. I argued that the current economic crisis was rooted in a political crisis epitomised by a lack of purpose and will. And at the heart of the political crisis itself was a moral crisis: the collapse of moral authority. (See Appendix 2)

Mrs G was now a prisoner of her own making, surrounded by demagogues and flatterers. Tragically, among her worst enemies was her own son, Sanjay, who had run wild and was to prove her nemesis. Mrs Gandhi still had a choice, but she chose not to take the road less travelled.

In 'The Road to Recovery', I outlined a Gandhian alternative with the focus on not merely agriculture but diversified farming, rural reconstruction and decentralised planning with employment generation through mass mobilisation of manpower for rural works. I advocated smaller units of administration and development, with maybe forty states, seven hundred districts and up to ten thousand development blocks. At the same time, I felt there should be larger techno-economic units to coordinate and integrate river boards, power grids, transport

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zones and so forth, and more purposeful zonal councils. The gulf between 'we' and 'them', Bharat and India, had to be bridged. I was in the process of discovering Gandhi:

> Gandhiji had the right idea. He was a revolutionary, and the New Society he conceived was a total concept . . .
>
> Perhaps India's salvation lies in a return to Gandhi, not to Gandhism. Gandhi's thought has immense relevance to India. It has to be broadened, updated and infused with the right mix of technology and management. It should not preclude large scale machine enterprise from which modern society cannot be altogether divorced. But it would maximise production and organisation on a widely decentralised basis and utilise local endowments and talents.

I urged electoral and social reform and a strengthened panchayati raj, with social investments in public transport, public health and public housing. The traditional sector, including khadi and village industries, required an infusion of science and management. I saw the educational system still faithfully serving the original purpose of Macaulay—to turn out babus, some more glorified than others. There had to be more streaming into vocational courses at the middle level, with merit scholarships for the needy. Higher education, in the words of the Education Commission, had to be a preparation for work rather than a substitute for work, turning out unemployables. I concluded:

> Nehru tried to find a synthesis between Gandhi and an industrial and technological revolution by repeatedly urging a combination of science and spirituality. He wished to temper the harsh and aggressive character of the acquisitive society with more enduring human values and compassion. This is the path India must find once more and make its own. In doing so, it will rediscover its soul.
>
> The quest must begin now. It is already very late.

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Within the media world, the so-called 'monopoly' papers had been under attack for some time, with suggestions that their ownership be diffused and an element of workers' participation in management introduced. The *HT* rebutted this line of argument as ideologically motivated. Nevertheless, in an informal 'annual report' to K.K. Birla early in 1970, I proposed setting up a board of editorial trustees as an

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independent buffer. Rotational retirement would infuse new blood every two years. Such an arrangement might blunt the demand for diffusion and set an example for other papers to follow.

Birla replied that the *HT* was held by several of the group's companies in each of which the family shareholding was less than 50 per cent. Hence a degree of diffusion already prevailed. Even so, at one time the family determined to part with its shares and set up a Hindustan Welfare Trust to which shares constituting 41.76 per cent of the *HT*'s equity were donated. This idea was, however, abandoned as the government contemplated restricting the voting power of trusts and vesting the same in a public trustee.

Actually, the threat to the press came from many quarters and through devious means. In September 1972, Calcutta papers reported a diatribe against the *HT* by the chief minister of West Bengal, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, charging it with 'spreading canards ... and malicious propaganda' against the state at the behest of 'a business house in Calcutta' (read Birlas) 'whose mouthpiece it was'. He was further reported as 'warning the Birlas' to stop their 'sinister campaign' against West Bengal.

Two well-documented articles by our Calcutta correspondent were the cause for this extraordinary outburst. They discussed certain activities of the Youth Congress and its affiliates that had caused public disquiet and embarrassed the state government. Nothing in those reports was refuted despite letters to the CM and his information department. So we wrote an editorial, 'Undeterred', dressing down Siddhartha Shankar Ray in no uncertain terms:

> Here is another example of a highly-placed politician openly and unashamedly—but unsuccessfully—seeking proprietorial interference to muzzle an independent paper. The cynicism underlying this petty manoeuvre by a pillar of a party that advocates 'diffusion' of press ownership, allegedly to save hapless editors and journalists from the tyranny of 'monopoly' owners, is the outstanding feature of this shabby episode. We propose to treat it with the contempt it deserves.

*

Sometime later, Birla rang me with three complaints about the *HT*'s coverage. Sanjay Gandhi felt the *HT* had been unfair in reporting the affairs of Maruti. The owners of the Modi Flour Mills Ltd believed that they were being targeted since we had persevered in covering a case

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involving the company. And Birla himself believed that we were gunning for L.N. Mishra (who was later assassinated) for his role in Bihar's troubled politics. I had no difficulty in countering all three complaints but was firm in stating that while we had no desire to pillory anybody, corruption was eating into the vitals of the country and we could not therefore be muzzled, and would continue to report all matters of public interest fairly and objectively.

This correspondence was spread over a whole year. Birla was obviously under increasing pressure and, on 25 July 1974, wrote to say that several people 'including ministers, MPs, politicians and others' had been telling him for some time that no one should continue as editor of a newspaper for more than five years'. He followed this up with another letter on 8 August stating that the *HT* Board had discussed the matter and had decided on a new editor for the paper from January or February the following year. Shorn of verbiage, I was, in fact, being sacked with six month's notice. The matter was taken to the Press Council, essentially a peer group of different categories of newspaper representatives along with some public figures and chaired by a former Supreme Court judge, functioning not as a court of law but as a 'court' of media ethics enjoined, among other things, to help newspapers maintain their independence and uphold freedom of the press. The matter reached the High Court and Supreme Court on procedural grounds and became a year-long cause celebre that was widely debated and reported in the country and abroad.

The background is interesting. I had written to K.K. Birla on 28 May 1974, reducing to writing a thought I had shared with him at a meeting some days earlier. I noted I would soon be completing six years as editor of the *HT* and suggested I step down and let someone else from the *HT* take over, while I devoted more of my time to writing and field reporting. The natural choice as my successor, I said, would be N.S. Jagannathan, a seasoned and respected journalist, and currently, deputy editor.

I explained my reasons. My stepping aside would open up avenues of advancement that could invigorate the paper. I said I would have no difficulty working under someone who had served under me as the *HT* was run as an editorial collective and work was conducted on the basis of wide consultation, with the editor being first among equals rather than a superior. The principle of a rotating editorial headship would enhance this sense of collective responsibility and had worked successfully at the Delhi School of Economics and IIM, Ahmedabad. I also wished to create room at the top and demonstrate the idea that,

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among professionals, 'what matters is what one is and not what one is called'. (I had for that reason dropped the nomenclature 'editor-in-chief' and designated myself 'editor', something I was to repeat at *The Indian Express* some years later.) Among the assignments I wanted to undertake was another Bharat darshan, such as I had twice done while with *The Times of India*. I offered to take an appropriate salary cut to match my reduced responsibilities, and once again adverted to the desirability of setting up a board of editorial trustees.

Birla replied on 1 June seeking time to consider my proposal but, meanwhile, expressing 'deep appreciation' for my 'unselfish motives' and 'great sacrifice'. A considered reply followed on 25 June, equally fulsome in praise of my 'objective approach'. He did not think Jagannathan would work out and then referred to the opinion expressed by 'MPs, ministers, politicians and others' that no one should continue as editor beyond five years, a proposition thereafter converted into a six month's dismissal notice on 8 August.

Since Jagannathan too was not responsive to my idea, I wrote to Birla suggesting that since my proposal for internal change without causing any disruption had proved stillborn, it might be considered a closed chapter as I had never intended to leave the paper. I had, indeed, only a little earlier proposed that the *HT* consider publishing fortnightly journals on education and culture and women and home, respectively, as well as two monthly reviews on economic and foreign affairs together with a weekly political review on the lines of the *HT*'s own aborted *Weekend Review*. These could be staggered over a five-year period. If, however, I had lost the proprietor's confidence, I was prepared to leave. I, accordingly, wrote to Birla on 15 August:

> As far as I am concerned, I accept your decision. I think it important that the editor should enjoy the fullest confidence and trust of the Chairman. If I have lost that for whatever reason, then I have no wish to stay and it would be improper of me to do so.
>
> What concerns me is something else: the prestige and future of *The Hindustan Times*. The *HT* is a large and influential paper, especially because of its primacy in the Capital. It has built up a certain reputation for independence and integrity and has come to be recognised . . . as possessing something of a social conscience and an innovative character. I fear that your decision will be regarded as a response to pressures from those in political power or elsewhere . . .

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> I am sorry you have responded to bad advice, possibly under pressure, because I imagine the change you propose will be regarded as inimical to freedom of the press.

An unhappy Birla responded on 21 September insisting that 'there is no question of there being any lack of confidence in you'. But he went on somewhat lamely to argue that 'the paper becomes stale in case the editor is not changed after a few years' and concluded, 'You have done so much for the paper that the board and the management will always remain grateful to you!'

I replied suggesting a formal announcement stating my services were being terminated. In the alternative, our correspondence might be published as staff members and readers would want an explanation and rumours were already afloat which placed me in a false position. Birla invited me to meet him and suggested that the change was being proposed as I had a 'problem'. I said I had no problem but if he had one, as appeared to be the case, I needed to understand what it was, so that matters could be resolved. If the management insisted that publication of the correspondence would be a 'breach of faith' and could attract legal action, then it must know it was no longer dealing with Verghese, an individual, but with the editor of the *HT*, who had a professional responsibility to his colleagues and readers to defend the freedom of the press:

> The ultimate test of freedom of the press is the right of dissent. This cannot mean irresponsibility. It does mean, however, that we must have the courage to state our views openly and frankly. We must be prepared to stand up and be counted. We must have the courage of our convictions. And if we are shown to be wrong, we must have the integrity to correct ourselves and apologise. This we have done and shall always strive to do. We certainly shall not be dictated to by a bunch of faceless men, those contemptible creatures be they politicians, howsoever powerful, or others who dare not face the editor but would stab him in the back.

I closed with Tagore's, 'Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high . . .', and said those words eloquently conveyed what I was talking about.

Taking umbrage at my stating that the management seemed incapable of understanding what I was talking about, and that the issue was no longer my job but whether the chairman and board could any longer be

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entrusted with the responsibility of running a great public institution like the *HT*, the management served me a 'show cause' notice and named Santosh Nath, the new general manager, as the inquiry officer.

Some of the correspondence had by now leaked—but not from me. D.R. Mankekar, an old friend and colleague, and C.P. Ramachandran, one of our assistant editors, had filed independent complaints before the Press Council on behalf of '*HT* readers' and the staff, respectively. There followed an informal 'stay' on further proceedings against me. There was a great deal of public indignation as word spread, and an outpouring of sympathy and support for me.

It was against this background that I was called upon to depose before the Press Council on 20 January 1975 with Mr Justice Rajagopala Ayyangar in the chair. Frank Anthony, assisted by J.B. Dadachandji, appeared for Birla while L.M. Singhvi and Kumar Shankardass most generously and spontaneously volunteered to represent me. Danial Latifi and M.K. Ramamurti appeared on behalf of the other plaintiffs. The hearings took place at the then office of the PCI at No. 10 Janpath, later to become the residence and office of Sonia Gandhi.

The *HT* had, meanwhile, approached the Delhi High Court seeking an injunction against the hearings on the ground that neither complaint was maintainable as freedom of the press could only be curbed by the government. Further, a few editor members of the PCI who were members of the All-India Newspaper Editor's Conference stood disqualified on account of bias as they had endorsed an AINEC resolution supporting me and criticising the *HT* management. Still later, it alleged bias against the PCI Chairman, Justice Ayyangar on the ground that he had shown undue interest in urging the formation of an *HT* editorial trust. The court refused a stay but said no ruling should issue until it had disposed of the case. A single bench ruled that the complaint was maintainable.

The *HT* challenged this before a division bench, which permitted the PCI to proceed with hearings without passing any final order until the matter had been disposed of by the court. The council thereupon proceeded to hear the complaint. K.K. Birla was summoned to the witness stand and subjected to cross-examination by the complainants' counsel over several days. He was unable to convince the council of the basis or merits of his stand against evidence brought forward to show that his companies had invested heavily in Maruti shares, and that he had been politically befriended by L.N. Mishra. Nor could he explain his touchiness about coverage of the Modi Flour Mills case, or the rationale of the five-year rule for editors, which the management had

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not previously applied and had not extended to the Hindi *Hindustan*. He named some ministers, MPs and others who had advised him to change the *HT* editor—several of them since deceased—but could not explain their interest in the matter. But he strongly refuted the suggestion that the minor politicians he had named masked the identity of powerful political figures including Sanjay Gandhi, L.N. Mishra, Uma Shankar Dikshit, then home minister, and others to whom he looked for support and favours. Mrs Gandhi personally denied press reports that she had instigated my ouster, but the allegation would not go away. A contemporary cartoon summed up the prevailing sentiment. The caption read: 'Mrs Gandhi admired; Verghese hired. Mrs Gandhi tired; Verghese fired'!

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court continued its hearings and delivered its judgment on 22 September 1975. This was summarised by Kumar Shankardass, one of my counsels, in the December 1975 issue of the Delhi monthly, *Seminar*, then edited by Romesh Thapar. Shankardass wrote that the most important question before the court was the scope and content of 'freedom of the press' and, in particular, whether it extended to the editor as a separate entity. The *HT* had submitted that the editor has no fundamental right of freedom of press under Article 19 as against the proprietor of a newspaper. Proprietors had a right to lay down the policy of their newspapers and were entitled to select the editor. In other words, it was contended by the *HT* that the expression 'newspaper' in Section 12 of the PCI Act, whose independence was sought to be protected by the council, implied the proprietor but not the editor, who was a limb of the newspaper.

The court differed. It held that the concept of freedom of the press could not be put in a strait-jacket. It was a living concept and liable to grow. The court observed that the editor is the living articulate voice of the press and speaks through the paper. The value of the newspaper lies in its content, the selection of which is the sole and undivided responsibility of the editor. The court agreed that the owners had the right to lay down the policy of the paper. But the selection of news, its truthful, objective and comprehensive presentation from all corners of the world was the editor's responsibility. Once the policy was laid down, the editor must be left to work independently within that framework.

The court dismissed K.K. Birla's writ and subsequently saw no reason to grant permission for an appeal to the Supreme Court. The judgment was delivered just before the court rose for the day. Within hours, and before the Press Council could intervene further, the *HT* management served me a notice of termination of services on 23 September 1975, as

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I was descending the stairs at the office. I walked away, asking that my personal papers be sent to my residence.

We had been preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the *HT*. C.P. Ramachandran had been assigned the task of writing the history of the paper. He had completed the early chapters dealing with the paper's founding in Punjab as an Akali organ, its takeover by Lala Lajpat Rai as a nationalist organ, with financial backing from G.D. Birla into whose hands it passed within a few years.

Thereafter, it moved to Delhi to become one of the foremost nationalist organs under Devdas Gandhi, enlivened by Shankar Pillai's cartoons. Lady Edwina Mountbatten first appeared in the news columns of the *HT* as a model for an advertisement for Ponds' face cream, long before Lord Louis Mountbatten was heard of in this country. Ramachandran had dug up many such anecdotal gems. The narrative was unfolding well and was written with real flair. As my encounter with K.K. Birla became known, Ramachandran had asked what he should write when he got to the last chapter. How should the story end? I said time would tell. Further work on the book remained suspended. On later inquiry, I was told the manuscript had been lost.

The staff had been wonderfully supportive. There was a sense of pride in the paper and a fierce desire to stand up for professional principles and values at a time of looming national crisis. A section of the Left-controlled *HT* union, however, played spoiler, with the backing of a top management shamefacedly looking for support. I still treasure the wonderful memento I received from my editorial colleagues: a hand-painted Rajasthani casket containing a scroll dated 1 October 1975, with some seventy-five signatures. There was no need for any inscription. The gesture said it all.

There had been newspaper reports and comments from far and near, about the case, and a constant flow of mail and telegrams expressing outrage, sympathy and good wishes from friends, associates, professional contacts and complete strangers. My wife and family stood solidly with me. I was not alone.

The upshot. Within a few months, the Press Council was abolished. Mrs Gandhi had had enough.

I must here add a postscript. Years later, in 2003, Bishan Tandon, joint secretary to the PM from 1969 to 1976, published the first volume of his *PMO Diaries*. Some of his entries as an insider confirmed what had long been known. On 19 January 1975, he wrote:

> I don't know the full details of why Verghese has been sacked. Some months ago, Seshan (PS to PM) had sent a small note to

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PM which I had seen. He had written in that note, 'I have spoken to K.K. Birla. He has give notice to Verghese.' It does look as if the PM had taken some interest in the matter.

If I have fast-forwarded the narrative to complete that personal story, I must now rewind to what had been happening concurrently. Raj Narain (Congress-O), who had stood against Mrs Gandhi from Rae Bareli in the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, had filed an election petition, which had come up before Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha in the Allahabad High Court. It alleged that she had misused official machinery in her campaign. Few expected anything to come of the case, which dragged its way through hearings that attracted little public or media attention. Shanti Bhushan, senior advocate, appeared for Raj Narain, a somewhat rumbustious, rustic character and not reputed for excessive gentility.

Then suddenly, on 12 June 1975, the court assembled to hear Justice Sinha's judgment. The charges against Mrs Gandhi were upheld and she was unseated from elective office for six years. Prima facie her offence seemed trivial. In accordance with the prevailing electoral law, it was argued that Mrs Gandhi had projected herself as a candidate from Rae Bareli on 29 December 1970, when she indicated at a press conference that she intended to stand for elections from that constituency.

Though nominations had to be filed by 3 February 1971, Yashpal Kapoor had already been drafted, while still formally a government servant and officer on special duty in the Prime Minister's Office. The charge was that on 7 January 1971, he had gone to a Martyr's Fair at Munshiganj, where he allegedly made some remarks in favour of Mrs Gandhi's election from Rae Bareli from where she was subsequently elected, defeating Raj Narain. She, however, pleaded that Yashpal Kapoor resigned from service on 13 January. This was formally accepted the following day and announced in a gazette notification dated 25 January. Raj Narain contended that the resignation only took effect on 6 February when the gazette was actually published.

Bishan Tandon's *Diaries* shed further light on this episode much later. His entry on 15 June 1975 reads: 'The truth is that Kapoor had submitted his resignation only on January 25 but he had back dated it to January 13. Action on it was taken on the 25th.' The doctored files were later burnt.

The Allahabad High Court judgment was stayed by Justice Sinha himself, pending an appeal to the Supreme Court. At the *HT* we took the line that 'there was no stay in the moral dimension' and that the proper course would be for the PM to resign pending disposal of her

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appeal. On the contrary, Mrs G decided to remain prime minister, obliterating the distinction between legality and legitimacy. Worse, the President, then in Srinagar, was 'advised' not to hurry back at a time when the country was plunged in uncertainty and confusion. The argument that the 'charges' involved petty technicalities did not wash as the law is the law for everybody, and in somewhat identical circumstances not so long ago, Mrs Gandhi had advised two senior colleagues, D.P. Mishra, chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, and Dr Chenna Reddy, steel minister, to step down.

In an editorial, 'Debasing the Political Coinage', we said we saw nothing 'technical' about the crude efforts being officially orchestrated to get people on the streets. The Cabinet had not met but many ministers were busy with a signature campaign to keep Mrs Gandhi afloat. Delhi Transport Corporation vehicles were taken off the roads, and a square mile or so around the PM's residence had been cordoned off to accommodate crowds brought in by the busload to hold demonstrations and show solidarity with Mrs G, even to shouting slogans against Justice Sinha. The fact that the Janata Front had defeated the Congress in Gujarat did little to cool Congress tempers. Sanjay Gandhi's storm troopers were out. What had been suspected was now there for all to see. Extra-legal authority was being almost openly exercised from the very seats of constitutional power. Sanjay had virtually crowned himself king.

Mrs Gandhi decided to appeal to the Supreme Court, which was on vacation until 14 July. The matter would, therefore, have to come up before the vacation judge for a conditional if not an absolute stay. We urged the speediest possible disposal of the case in order to avoid tensions and confrontation.

The Congress was, however, on the war path. On 18 June, the Congress Parliamentary Party met and adopted a ringing vote of confidence in the leader. In an exhibition of what the *HT* characterised as 'dangerous claptrap' members exalted the Fuehrer Principle, asserting the indispensability of Mrs Gandhi. Y.B. Chavan went as far as to say, 'What happens to Indira happens to India', an echo of the Congress president, Dev Kant Barooah's infamous slogan, 'Indira is India and India is Indira'.

Far from being coy, Mrs G announced she was not going to oblige the Opposition by resigning. She pledged that there would be no slackening in the implementation of radical programmes and that 'we would not allow the country to be weakened or its aspirations thwarted'. This was sheer demagogy. The next few days were to see a spurt in radical rhetoric.

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On 24 June, the vacation judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Krishna Iyer, converted the absolute stay granted by Justice Sinha into a conditional stay. This entitled Mrs Gandhi to sign the parliamentary register but not participate in the proceedings, vote or draw the usual allowances. We faulted Justice Iyer's reasoning as Parliament was not in session and so these would, at best, be prospective sanctions, while an ineligible MP continued as prime minister. Even otherwise, Mrs Gandhi's legal and moral position had suffered further erosion. We pleaded that 'it was a time (for her) to go' despite promptings otherwise by a multitude of sycophants.

> If she is the leader, then it is for her to decide . . . She has even now one last opportunity to rise above the controversy and narrow legalities and redeem herself, her party and her government by resigning with grace and dignity. The country will not fall apart. She can continue to lead the Congress Party even if she is not Prime Minister. By so doing, she will end the growing unease in her own party and uncertainty in the country. Let the matter be disposed of without gnawing tension. And if the final verdict is in her favour, she could triumphantly lead her party in the ensuing polls—and, if victorious, return to office as Prime Minister. The alternative would be to give another twist to the debasement of standards and moral decline and risk having to depend on methods of 'guided democracy' and populist demagogy to survive. That could do Mrs Gandhi little good. It could be disastrous for the country.

*

It was too late. Jayaprakash Narayan and leading lights of the Opposition were to address a rally at Delhi's Ramlila grounds the next evening. There was a huge assembly. JP spoke of Total Revolution, still an amorphous slogan, and once again, most unwisely, called upon armed personnel not to obey 'illegal orders'.

Siddhartha Ray, Mohan Kumaramangalam and certain officials had burnt the midnight oil to advise Mrs Gandhi on how an 'internal emergency' might be imposed on the existing 'external emergency'. But even Ray baulked at further touches to a dark conspiracy to subvert the rule of law, by muzzling the courts. A hapless law minister, H.R. Gokhale, looked on. But the 'internal emergency to prevent public disorder' was grafted on to the existing 1971 wartime emergency. The Janata Front

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rally concluded around 8 p.m. I had seen the late evening edition and read the teleprinter 'rushes' of the rally before retiring for the night, deeply uneasy about what the morrow held.

JP symbolised a mood from which he sought to fashion a movement. He had earlier tried to refashion a national consensus and continued to advocate the path of consensual politics. Though starting from different premises, both he and, to stretch a point, Mrs Gandhi were concerned with the same basic problem of national reconstruction. There might have been convergence had there been dialogue. Unfortunately, this was not to be and JP was swept on to the path of struggle even while groping to fill out his Gandhian frame with elements of a social and economic programme. With the non-CPI Opposition rallying around him, confrontation intensified. Something had to give. The question was what, when, how?

A little before 2 a.m. on 26 June, the phone rang in my bedroom. It was Abhay Chajjlani, editor of *Nai Dunia* from Indore. Was anything happening in Delhi, he asked anxiously? I asked why he thought so. He said his premises, like those of other newspapers in Indore, had been raided, the presses stopped and all newspaper bundles seized. Political leaders had been arrested. I said I would find out and call back if I could. Another call followed immediately thereafter from (was it) Romesh Chandra of *The Hind Samachar*, Jullundur, sounding a similar alarm. I rang Romesh Thapar, who exclaimed, 'My God, so it's happened!'

I called the *HT*. The city edition was still in the midst of its first run. I asked the news editor to summon the bureau chief, chief reporter, photographers and all possible hands to scour the city and to alert our state correspondents and be prepared to run a new late edition or a special supplement. I would be coming over immediately. I too called some of my colleagues, summoning them to the office. By then, word was out that JP, Morarji and a host of other leaders, down to the second and third rung, had been arrested all over the country. A crackdown had begun. The arrests had commenced just before midnight. The newspapers along Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, our so-called Fleet Street, had been plunged in darkness. We learnt later that their electricity connection had been cut off from a single master sub-station. But idiocy often triumphs. Someone had forgotten to order a similar blackout at the *HT* and *The Statesman* in Connaught Circus. We were still in business.

The Tandon *Dairies* confirmed the sequence of events. One of the entries for 26 June 1975 read:

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> On reaching office I went straight to Sharada (Prasad's) room. He told me in detail whatever he knew. Last night (June 25) the PM had summoned him and Prof (P.N.) Dhar to her house at 10 p.m. Barooah and Ray were already there. When Prof Dhar and Sharada reached there, the PM told them, 'I have decided to declare an Emergency. The President has agreed. I will inform the cabinet tomorrow.' Later in the day, Seshan added, 'I don't know what will happen. Sanjay has taken control completely.'

We learnt that the President hummed and hawed timidly, but accepted the PM's diktat without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, although this was a constitutional requirement.

I got to the *HT* by 2.30 a.m. by when one or two others had trickled in. We added a 'stop press' insertion to the late city edition under printing. We also prepared to bring out an early morning supplement, to hit the streets as soon as possible with whatever news we could gather, and with whatever staff was available, as many sub-editors, compositors and press workers had gone off the night shift. A reporter rang to say the Cabinet had been summoned for an urgent meeting at 6 a.m. at the prime minister's residence. Great efforts were made subsequently to portray the Emergency as having been declared on 26 June so as to provide some cover for the gross illegality that had been committed—a civil coup.

The promulgation of the internal Emergency was conveyed to a subdued Cabinet on the 26th morning with only Swaran Singh raising a mildly questioning voice. Meanwhile, the first posters went up in the *HT* press notice-boards stating that the editor and a clique of anti-people journalists could not put the livelihood of the press workers and staff in jeopardy. By now the management was astir and had summoned the watch and ward to bar us from entry to the press, and shut it off. With great difficulty we managed to get, maybe, a couple of hundred copies of our 26 June Emergency Supplement printed before the rotary ground to a halt. We collected those precious copies and carried them out for selective private distribution by journalist staff. I retained a copy. It is probably now a collector's item.

We were by now well into another day. The sun had climbed the sky but a long dark night had fallen. Our worst fears had come true.

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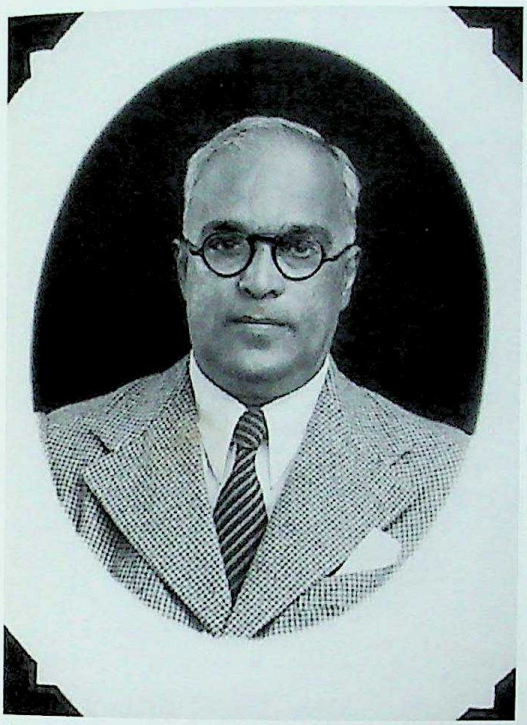
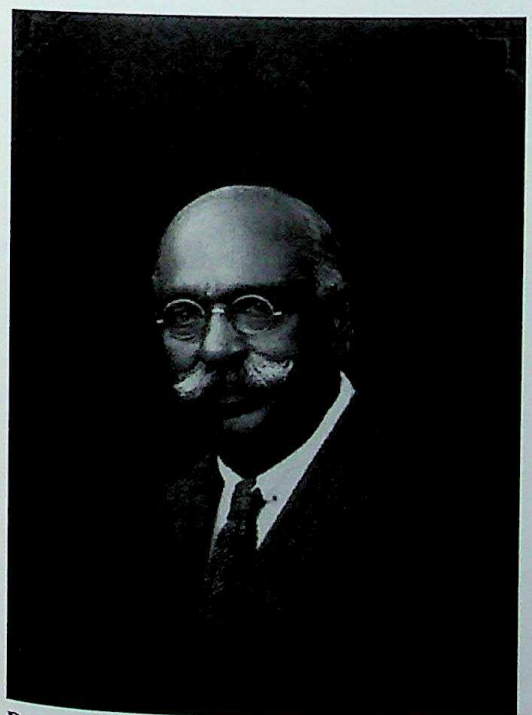
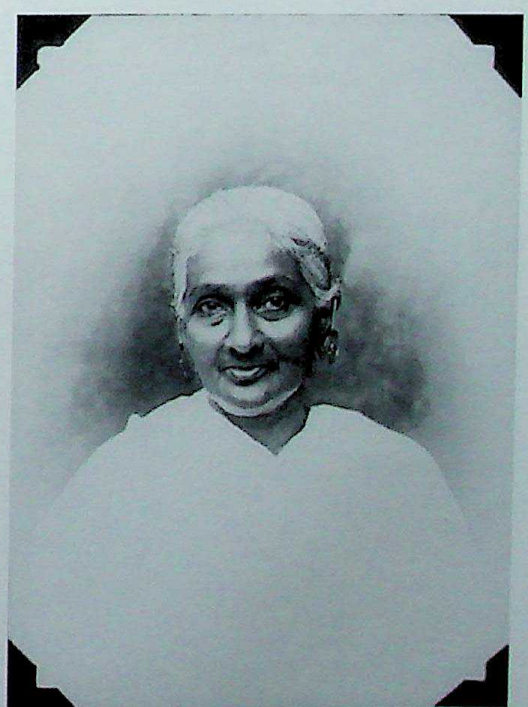


Lt.Col. G. Verghese, IMS (father)

Anamma Verghese (mother)



Dewan Bahadur, Dr. V. Verghese (grandfather)



Rahelamma Verghese (grandmother)

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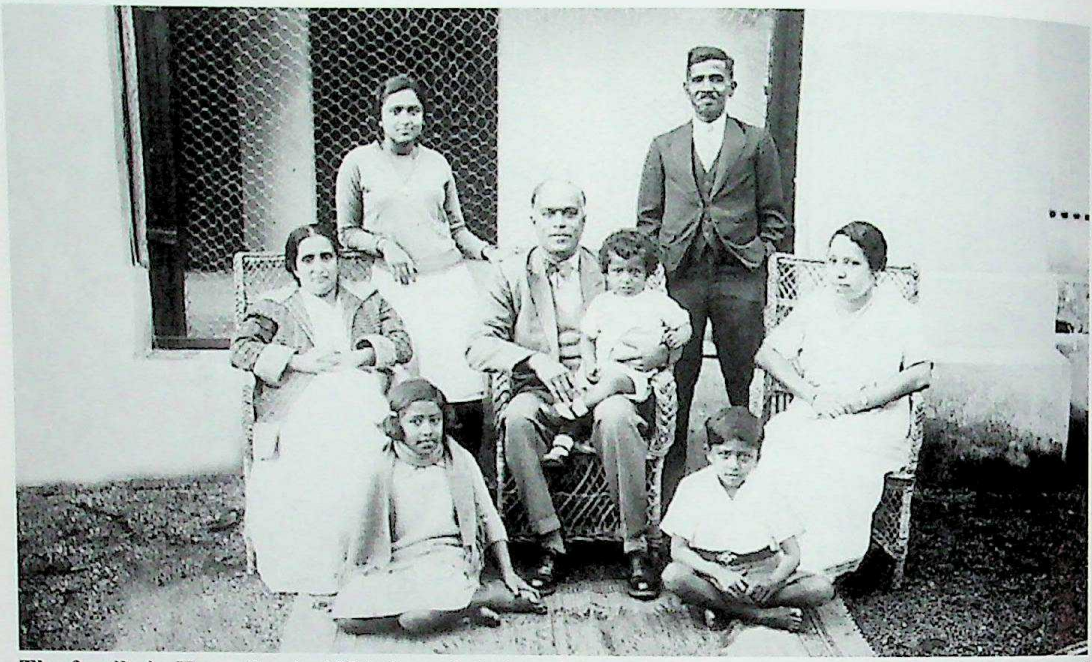

The family in Hazaribagh, 1934. Seated *(left to right)*: Mother, Father with Roshan in his lap and Miss Bora, the governess; *Standing*: Lulu and a family friend; *Bottom:* Meenu and the author

After the wedding: the newly-weds outside the church, 19 September 1952
***(Left to right)*: Uncle Alfred, Anamma Verghese, Col. Verghese, Jamila, Lulu, the author, Sarah Barakatullah, Meenu, Uncle Nazir. (*Bottom right)*: Rajika Shukla**

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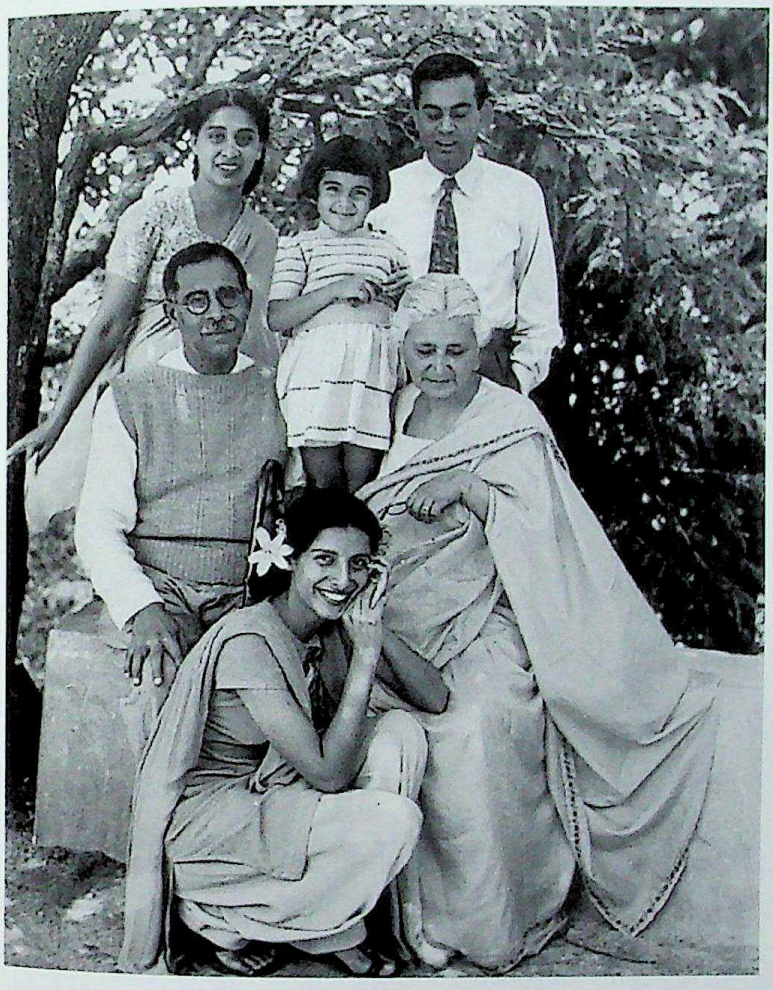
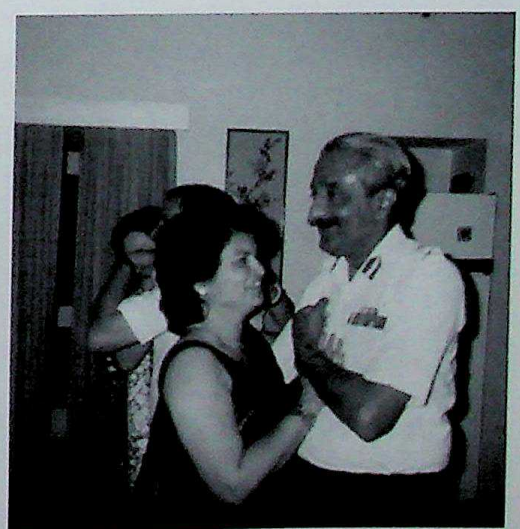


Seated: **Revd and Sarah Barakathullah (Jamila's parents);** ***Standing:*** **Leela and Victor Shukla with their daughter Rajika;** ***Bottom***: **Jamila**

Jamila with her sister Dr Seeta Sinclair ***(left)*** **and her daughter Parvin** ***(right)***



Roshan (Maj Gen John Verghese) and Susan

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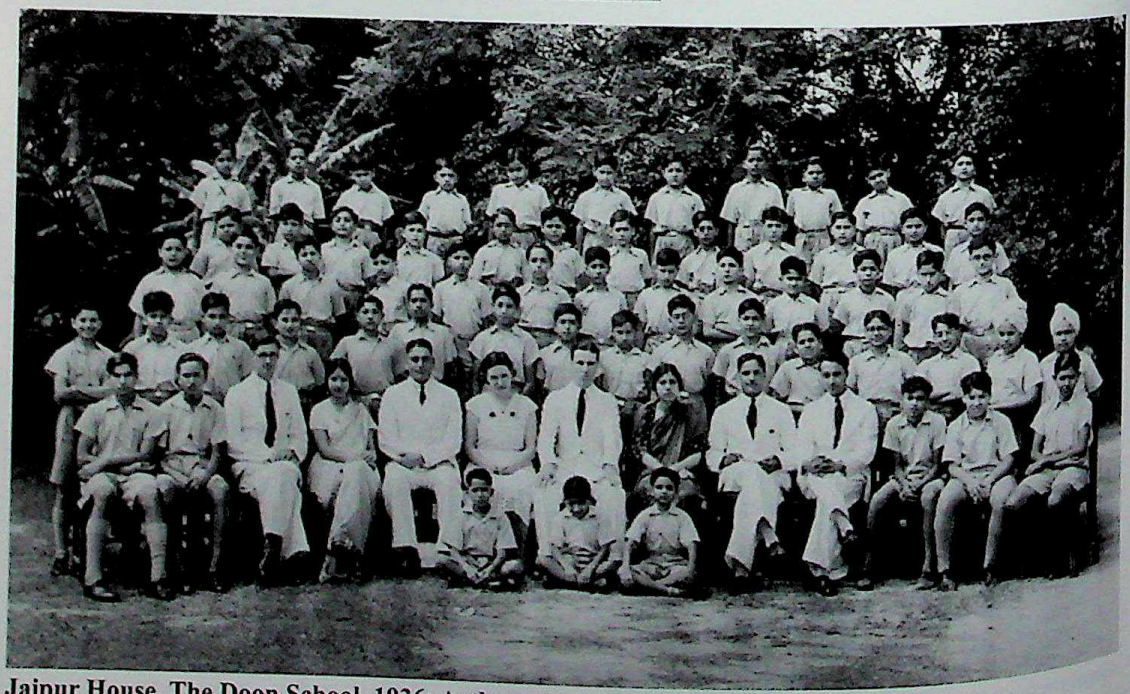
**Arthur Foot,
Headmaster,
The Doon School**



Jaipur House, The Doon School, 1936: Arthur at top left

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Holidaying in Hong Kong, 2010

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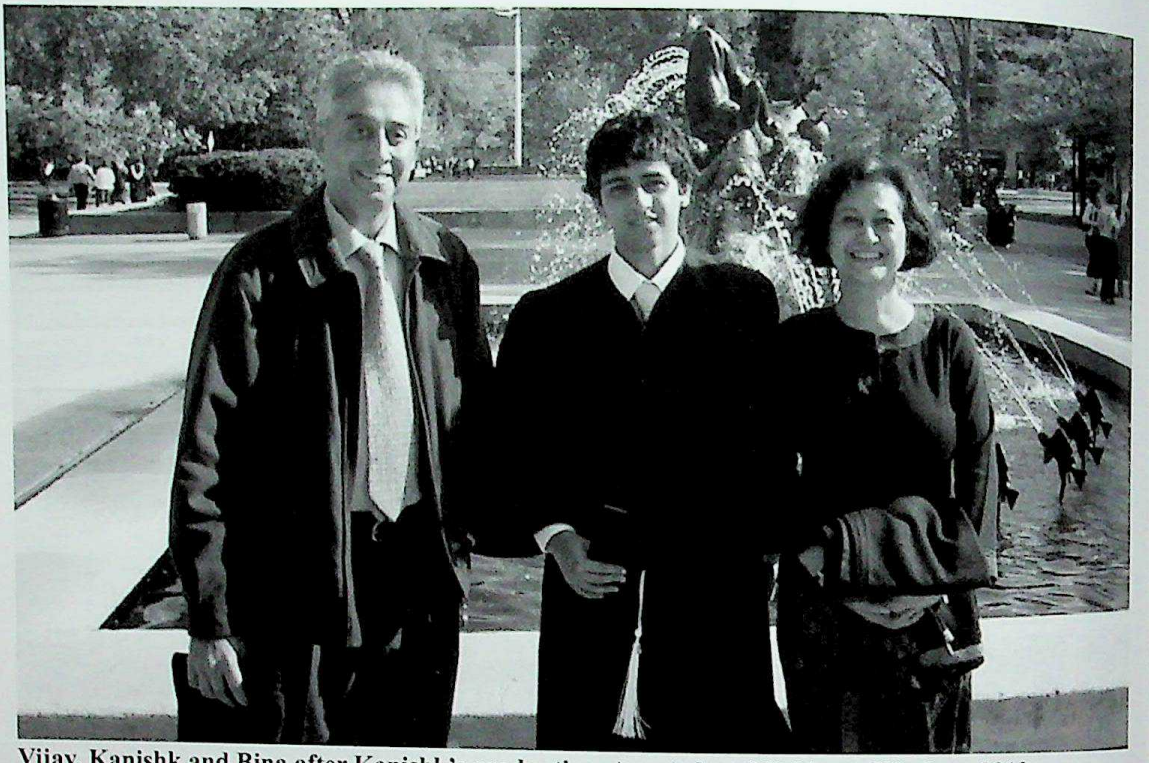
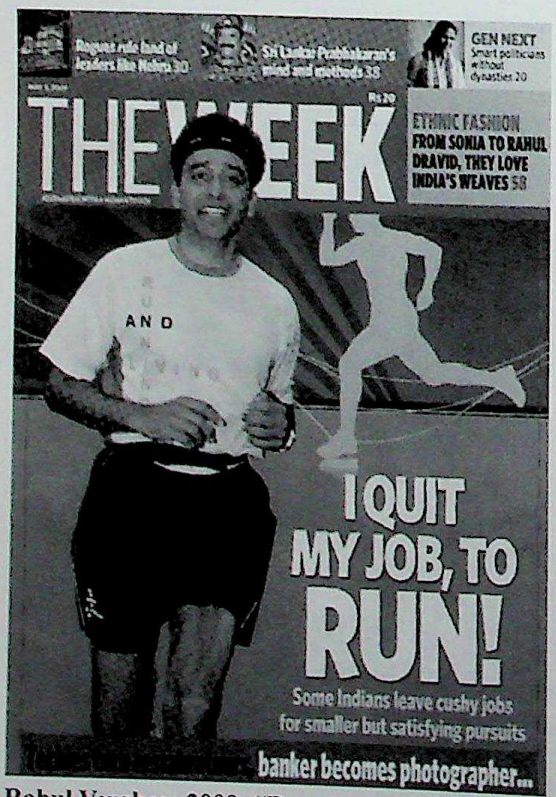


Vijay, Kanishk and Bina after Kanishk's graduation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, US, June 2010



Rahul Verghese 2009: "Running and Living"

Jamuna (*center*) flanked by Naina *(left)* and Diya *(right)*

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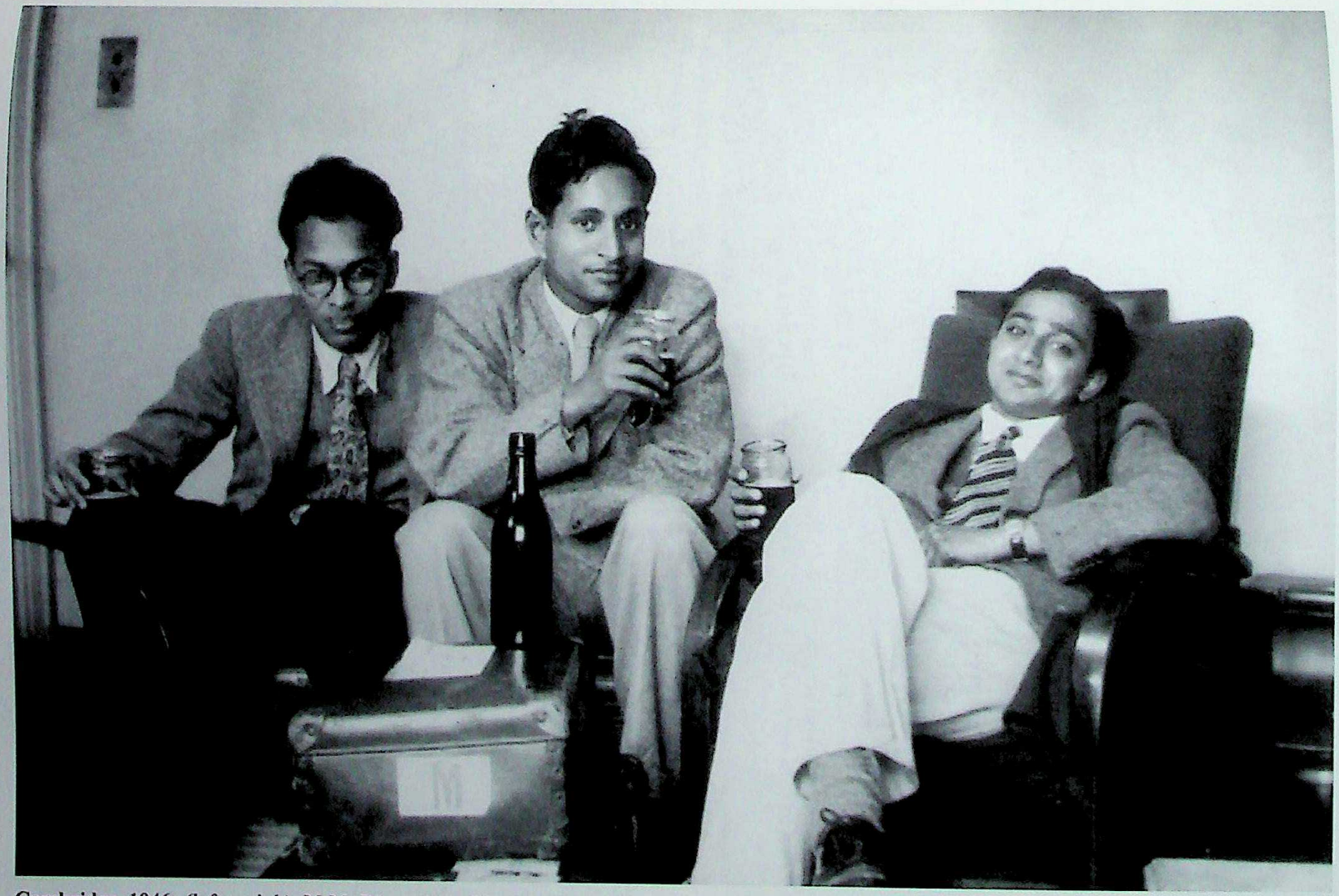

Cambridge, 1946: ***(left to righ)*****: M.M. Dhar** (later Director, Central Drugs Research Institute, Lucknow), **Jagat Mehta** (later Foreign Secretary) **and the author**

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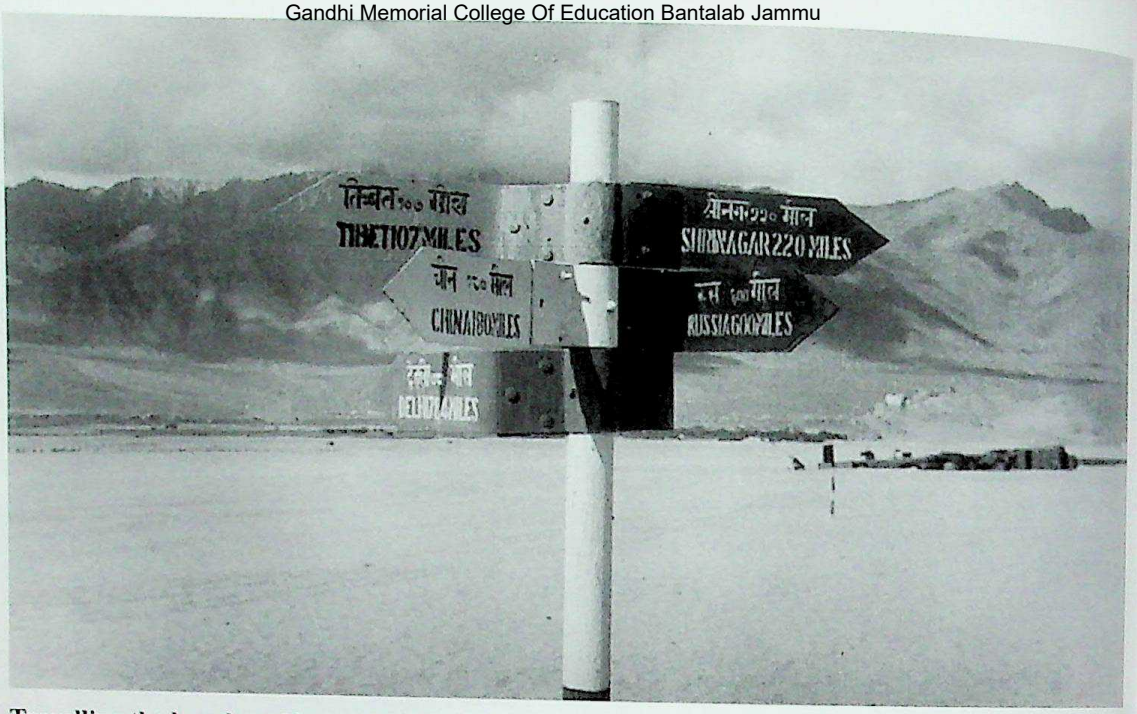

Travelling the length and breadth of India, reporting: Leh 'Airport', 1958, with a wooden signpost pointing to Srinagar (220 miles), Russia, Tibet, China, Delhi. Leh was a crossroads and market on the Silk Route

Media protest against the Defamation Bill: *(left to right)* N. Ram, the author, Nikhil Chakravartty, Dileep Padgaonkar, M.V. Desai, Malini Parthasarthi, K.K. Katyal, H.K. Dua

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Protests over the author's dismissal from the *Hindustan Times*, 1975. One placard reads: 'Mrs Gandhi Admired, Verghese was Hired. Mrs Gandhi Tired, Verghese was Fired'.

Editor's Den: The author in his study at home.

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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Regd No D-(c) 167 New Delhi Thursday June 26 1975 10 PAISE

Over 100 Delhi arrests

JP, DESAI, RAJ NARAIN HELD UNDER MISA IN PRE-DAWN SWOOP

Dissident Congress leaders arrested

NEW DELHI, June 25 (PTI) — Mr Ram Dhan, secretary of the Congress Parliamentary Party, was arrested early today.

A dissident Young Turk leader Chandra Shekhar was also arrest-

POLICE TAKE BOSU, CHARAN SINGH, GUHA

NEW DELHI, June 26 (UNI, PTI)—In a pre-dawn swoop Delhi police rounded up Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan and several other Opposition political leaders including Mr Raj Narain and Mr Morarji Desai under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act.

Mr Jayaprakash Narayan was taken into police custody early this morning from the Gandhi Peace Foundation where he was staying.

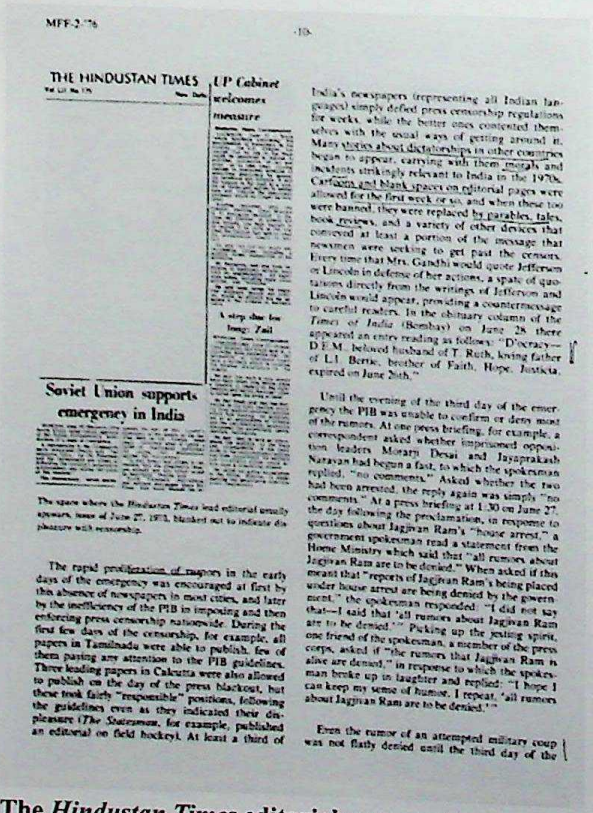
Opposition leaders in Tihar jail

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, June 26 — In a major pre-dawn swoop police took into custody all important non-Communist Opposition leaders from different parts of the Capital.

According to unofficial sources, over 150 Opposition leaders have

The axe falls: Emergency, 26 June 1975



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

UP Cabinet welcomes measure

Soviet Union supports emergency in India

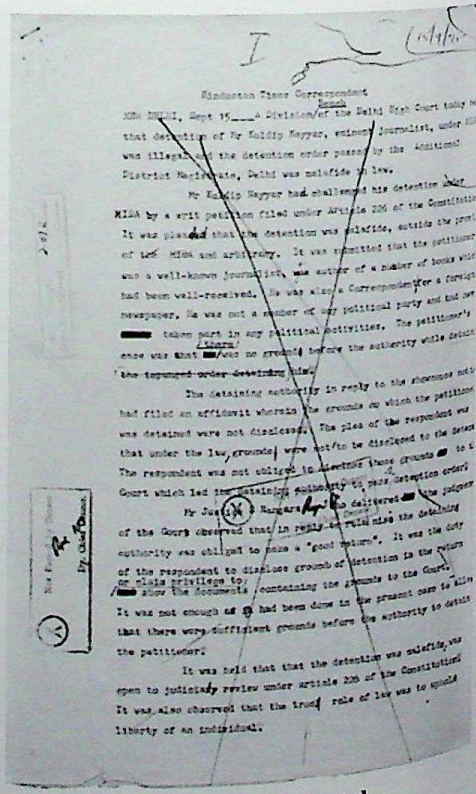
India's newspapers (representing all Indian languages) simply defied press censorship regulations for weeks while the better ones contented themselves with the usual ways of getting around it. Many stories about dictatorships in other countries began to appear, carrying with them morals and incidents strikingly relevant to India in the 1970s. Cartoons and blank spaces on editorial pages were allowed for the first week or so and when these too were banned, they were replaced by parables, tales, book reviews, and a variety of other devices that conveyed at least a portion of the message that newsmen were seeking to get past the censors. Every time that Mrs. Gandhi would quote Jefferson or Lincoln in defense of her actions, a spate of quotations directly from the writings of Jefferson and Lincoln would appear, providing a countermessage to careful readers. In the obituary column of the *Times of India* (Bombay) on June 28 there appeared an entry reading as follows: "Dicracy—D.E.M., beloved husband of T. Ruth, loving father of L.I. Bertie, brother of Faith, Hope, Justicia, expired on June 26th."

Until the evening of the third day of the emergency the PIB was unable to confirm or deny most of the rumors. At one press briefing, for example, a correspondent asked whether imprisoned opposition leaders Morarji Desai and Jayaprakash Narayan had begun a fast, to which the spokesman replied, "no comments." Asked whether the two had been arrested, the reply again was simply "no comments." At a press briefing at 1.30 on June 27, the day following the proclamation, in response to questions about Jagjivan Ram's "house arrest," a government spokesman read a statement from the Home Ministry which said that "all rumors about Jagjivan Ram are to be denied." When asked if this meant that "reports of Jagjivan Ram's being placed under house arrest are being denied by the government," the spokesman responded: "I did not say that—I said that 'all rumors about Jagjivan Ram are to be denied.'" Picking up the jesting spirit, one friend of the spokesman, a member of the press corps, asked if "the rumors that Jagjivan Ram is alive are denied," in response to which the spokesman broke up in laughter and replied: "I hope I can keep my sense of humor. I repeat, 'all rumors about Jagjivan Ram are to be denied.'"

Even the rumor of an attempted military coup was not flatly denied until the third day of the

The space where the *Hindustan Times* lead editorial usually appears, issue of June 27, 1975, blanked out to indicate displeasure with censorship.

The *Hindustan Times* editorial comment in its issue of 26 June 1975: a blank Editorial to protest censorship.



Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Sept 15 — A Division Bench of the Delhi High Court today held that detention of Mr Kuldip Nayyar, eminent journalist, under MISA was illegal and the detention order passed by the Additional District Magistrate, Delhi was malafide in law.

Mr Kuldip Nayyar had challenged his detention under MISA by a writ petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution. It was pleaded that the detention was malafide, outside the purview of the MISA and arbitrary. It was submitted that the petitioner was a well-known journalist, was author of a number of books which had been well-received. He was also a Correspondent of a foreign newspaper. He was not a member of any political party and had not taken part in any political activities. The petitioner's case was that there was no ground before the authority which detained him to make the impugned order detaining him.

The detaining authority in reply to the averments made in the petition had filed an affidavit wherein the grounds on which the petitioner was detained were not disclosed. The plea of the respondent was that under the law, grounds were not to be disclosed to the detenu. The respondent was not obliged to disclose those grounds as to the Court which led the detaining authority to pass detention order.

Mr Justice S. Ranga[illegible] delivered the judgment of the Court observed that in reply to rule nisi the detaining authority was obliged to make a "good return". It was the duty of the respondent to disclose grounds of detention to the return or claim privilege to allow the documents containing the grounds to the Court. It was not enough as had been done in the present case to allege that there were sufficient grounds before the authority to detain the petitioner.

It was held that that the detention was malafide was open to judicial review under article 226 of the Constitution. It was also observed that the true role of law was to uphold liberty of an individual.

Censorship was brutal and total

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INDIAN EXPRESS

Largest combined net sales among all daily newspapers in India

New Delhi Monday March 21, 1977

MRS GANDHI LOSES BY 55,000 VOTES

Congress rout in north, better showing in south

Sanjay Gandhi, Bansi Lal out

A verdict against emergency

6 ministers defeated, four returned

Party position

Congress routed in March, 1977

Election special supplement

INDIAN EXPRESS

Largest combined net sales among all daily newspapers in India

New Delhi Monday March 21, 1977

B. D. JATTI LIFTS EMERGENCY

PM not to resign till all results are out

JP arriving on Wednesday

All quiet at PM's house

Finest hour, says Morarji Desai

Janata leaders hold informal parleys

Results at a glance

Janata building up good lead

End of the long night: 24 March 1977

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Indira Gandhi working while flying

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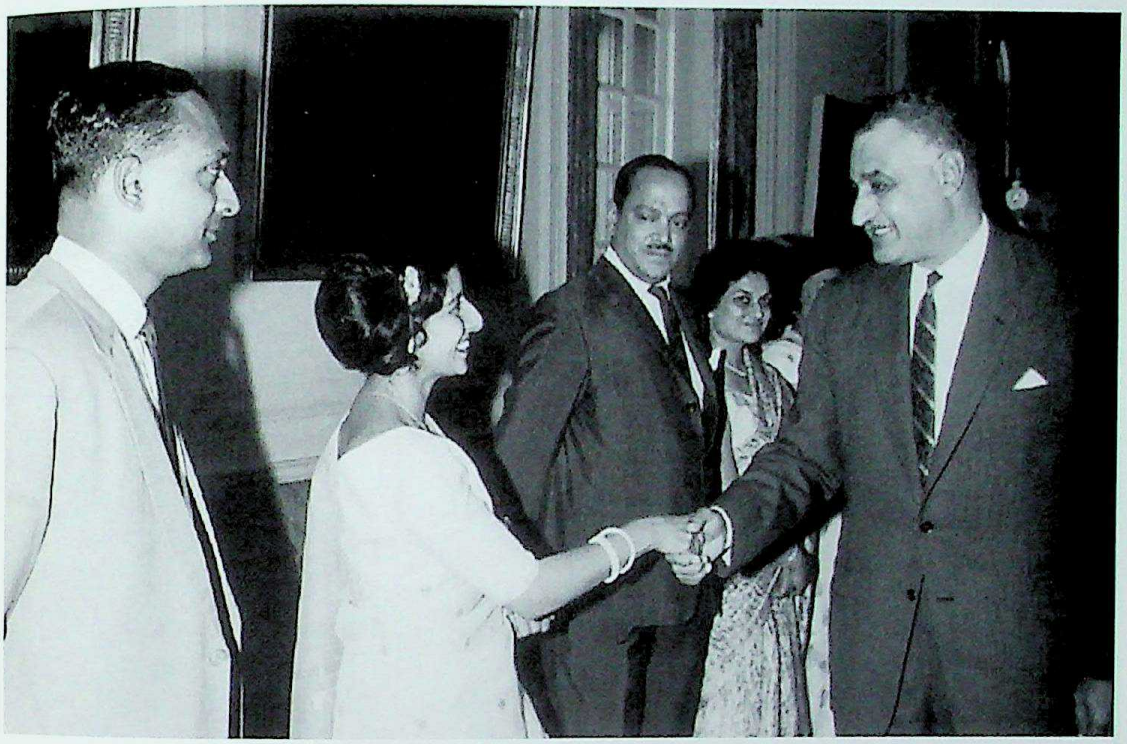

Jamila and the author being greeted by President Nasser of Egypt in Delhi, 1967

With Ulanfu, Vice-chairman of the National People's Congress and member of the Politbureau of the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing, 1978, as leader of the Indian Press delegation to China

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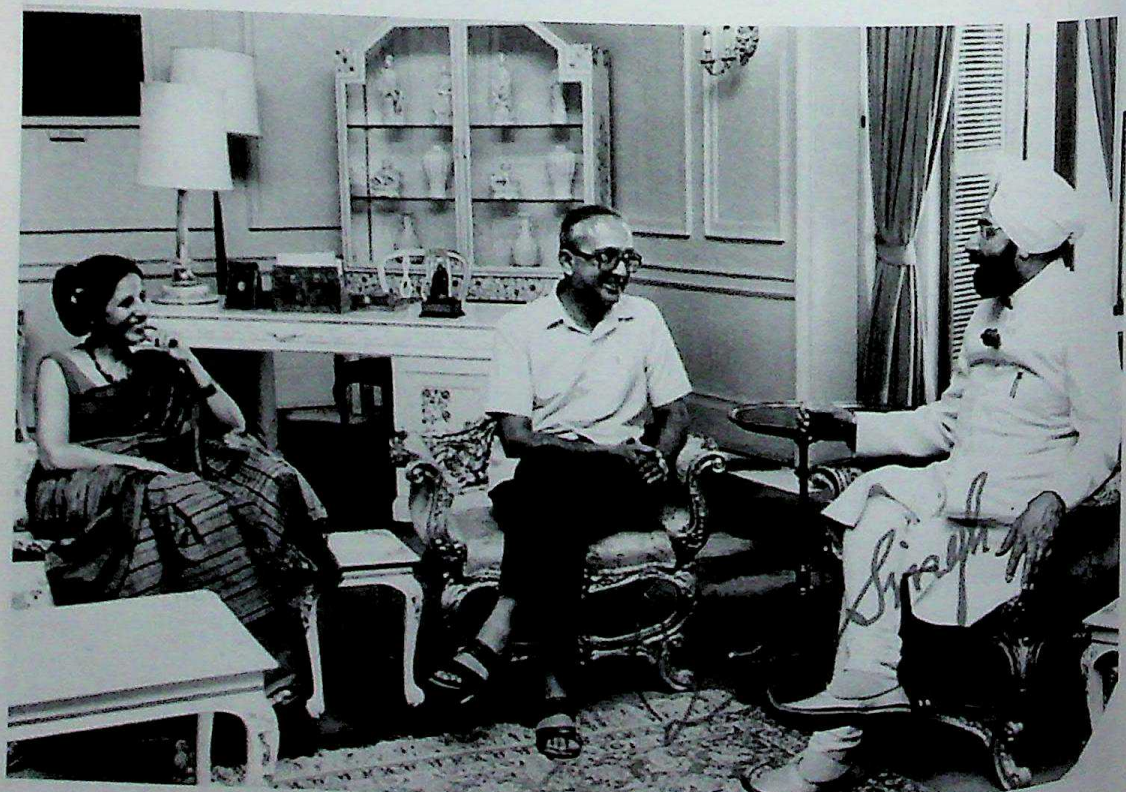
With President Zia ul Haq of Pakistan. Islamabad, 1983



Jamila and the author with President Giani Zail Singh at Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1984

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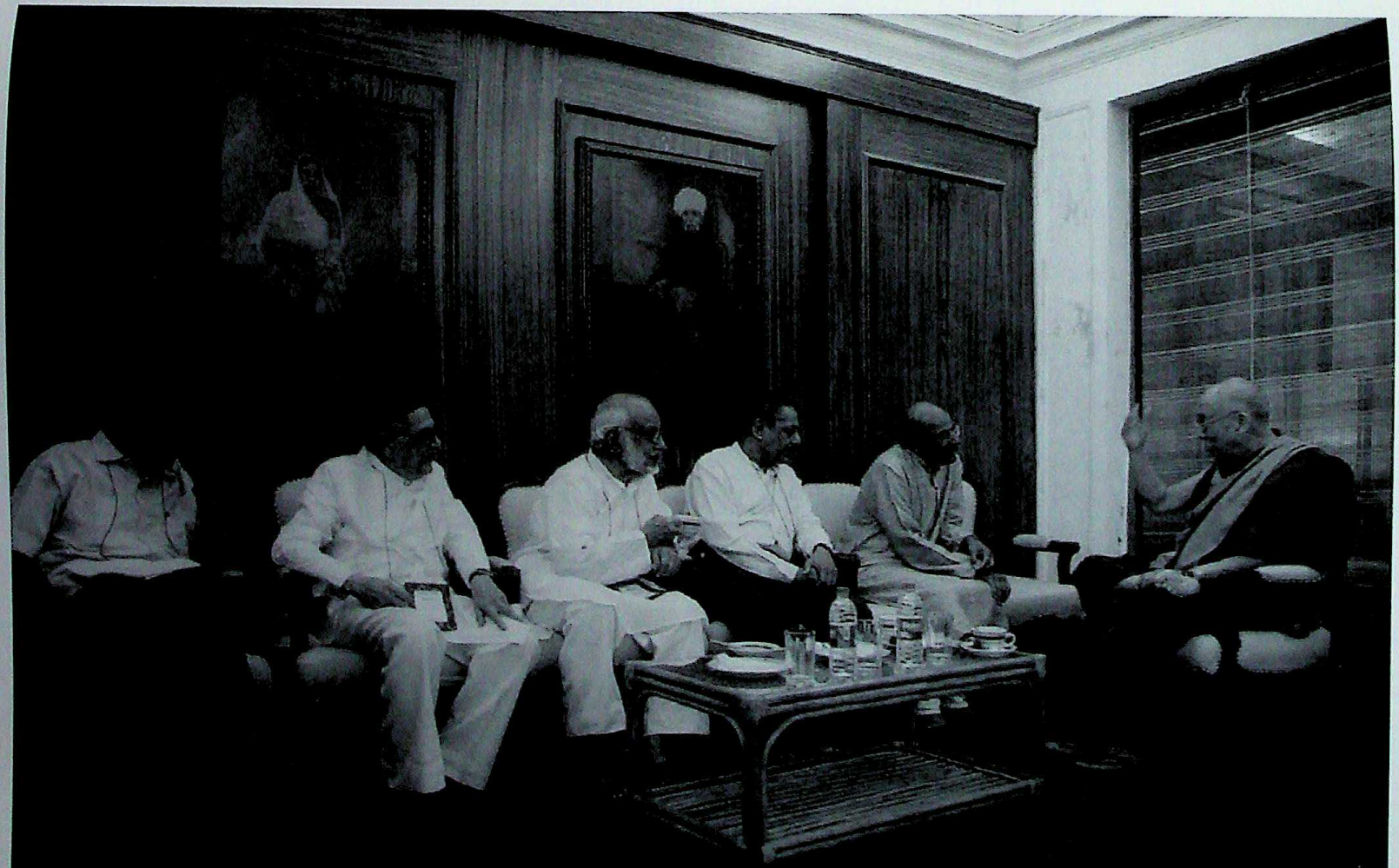

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, at Gandhi Smriti, Delhi: *(left to right):* The author, Fali Nariman, senior advocate, Prof M.G.K. Menon, scientist, Dr Naresh Trehan, cardiologist, Shyam Saran, the prime minister's special envoy on climate change and H.H. the Dalai Lama

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The author *(extreme left)* with fellow recipients of the Ramon Magsaysay award, 1975

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8

NO TALKING! THERE'S AN EMERGENCY

Censorship was the primary instrument of the Emergency and it resulted in the atomising of society and the creation of fear and uncertainty. Everything else followed. Vox populi was officially silenced. Tongues wagged. Rumours spread.

Censorship in India had been imposed for the first time in November 1780 on *The Bengal Gazette* (or *Calcutta General Advertiser*), popularly known as *Hicky's Gazette* after its publisher, James Augustus Hicky. The order was passed by the governor general, Warren Hastings, and censorship thereafter remained an instrument of the Raj, off and on, to restrain and control the nationalist press. Independence saw freedom of speech and expression enshrined as a Fundamental Right under Article 19 (1)a of the Constitution, but subject to restrictions under 19 (2) on a number of grounds, including the security of the state, public order and incitement to an offence. The very first amendment of the Constitution in 1951 made 19 (2) subject to 'reasonable' restrictions, in order to obviate arbitrary restraints. It was this element of 'reasonableness' that Mrs Gandhi threw to the winds by the Censorship Order and Guidelines introduced on 26 June 1975.

The Rule of Law was supplanted by the Rule of Men. These rules were framed differently for different people. Some were more equal than others. None who opposed the powers-that-be were spared. In August 1975, even P.N. Haksar felt the heat. He had been critical of many things, including Sanjay's interventions and the favours being

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shown to Maruti, and had been moved from his powerful position as secretary to the PM to the Planning Commission as deputy chairman. His wife was nearly arrested on a trumped-up charge and this was prevented only by a call to Mrs Gandhi. But a message had been sent.

The President formally signed the Emergency Order around 7 a.m. on 26 June 1975, though it had been enforced the previous midnight. The prime minister had staged a constitutional coup.

After the *HT*'s 26 June supplement hit the streets, I returned home to freshen up for what I suspected might be a long day. Within a few hours, the electricity supply to the *HT* and *The Statesman* was cut, and the Jana Sangh paper, *Motherland*, was shut down. Word had gone round at the instance of Kuldip Nayar, then general manager and editor of UNI, calling on journalists to gather at the Press Club to take stock of the situation. Not all came. Fear had taken hold.

Those there adopted a resolution deploring censorship and the manner in which it had been imposed, and appealed to the prime minster to reverse the order. Kuldip was arrested for his pains and lodged in Tihar Jail, where he remained for six weeks until released under a court order. C.G.K. Reddy, a friend and long-time newspaper management guru, was picked up from Delhi in connection with the so-called Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy Case, an incendiary attack allegedly planned during the railway strike, and supposedly masterminded by George Fernandes who was incarcerated for the duration of the Emergency.

I returned to the office. The editorial staff were depressed and the younger members angry. The management and union were distinctly hostile and ready to prevent any editorial mischief, as they saw it. Inder Gujral, information and broadcasting minister, who refused to take orders from Sanjay Gandhi, was seen as too soft for the job by the PM, and made to switch places with the minister of state for planning, Vidya Charan Shukla.

Shukla swung into action without ado. He summoned leading Delhi editors to his residence and laid down the law. We had all known him as an innocuous functionary. Now, dressed in new authority, he revealed an iron fist as he laid out the new censorship rules. Harry D'Penha, the well-liked and essentially gentle press information officer, was made chief censor. He hated his job but knew his head was on the chopper if anything untoward got into print. I sat with my colleagues to see how we might beat the censor by allegory, quotations, puns, sarcasm, fulsome praise, juxtaposing contrasting items and through innuendo. We believed our readers would soon learn the code.

With no hope of a restoration of electricity, I thought I might take

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counsel with my peers and called on other editors. Chalapathi Rau of *The National Herald*, a shoddy Congress organ, and Edatata Narayanan of the CPI-oriented *Patriot*, said the press had invited trouble through irresponsible and partisan writing. As pro-establishment figures, nothing else was expected of them. Girilal Jain of *The Times* also leant towards the establishment. Sahay, resident editor of *The Statesman*, was highly indignant and ready to take concerted action with C.R. Irani, the paper's chief editor in Calcutta. S. Mulgaonkar, the editor of *The Indian Express*, was enigmatic. Ramnath Goenka, chairman of the Express Group, was down with a heart attack in a Calcutta nursing home, and SM pleaded that he could not commit himself to anything that could cause Goenka further difficulties. Kuldip Nayar (Express News Service editor) and Ajit Bhattacharjea, then editing JP's Express-backed *Everyman*, were however raring to go.

The internal Emergency had been proclaimed on the grounds of 'internal disturbances'. Mrs Gandhi's broadcast the previous evening spoke of 'a deep and wide conspiracy' ever since she introduced progressive reforms to benefit the common man. 'The actions of a few are endangering the rights of a vast majority,' she said. The armed forces had been incited to mutiny and the police to rebel. A Cabinet colleague, L.N. Mishra, had been murdered and there had been a dastardly attack on the Chief Justice of India. 'In the name of democracy . . . the forces of disintegration are in full play and communal passions are being aroused, threatening our unity.'

The prime minister then turned to the personal attacks on her. 'All manner of false allegations have been hurled against me. The Indian people have known me since my childhood. All my life has been in the service of our people. This is not a personal matter. It is not important whether I remain prime minister or not. However the institution of the prime minister is important, and the deliberate political attempt to denigrate it is not in the interest of democracy or of the nation.'

Mrs Gandhi saw herself as a latter day St. Joan sent to save India by doing whatever her inner voices dictated. And if 'Indira was India', it was supremely important to save the saviour. The end justified the means. In another broadcast on 27 June, the prime minister defended censorship though she said she believed in press freedom. That same day she addressed senior civil servants and, going over much the same ground, compared what had been recently happening in India under JP's leadership to the rise of Nazi Germany through Hitler's demagogy.

It was not the happiest ending to a cheerless day. We had decided not to write any editorial for the next day's issue. But since the management

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and the union were jointly maintaining a vigil against 'editorial sabotage', we delayed sending any material for composing. Balram Tandon, the edit page editor, kept himself busy to throw everybody off the scent. The edit page was 'released' along with the front page as we neared the print deadline. The rotary roared to life and copies dated 28 June rolled hot off the press.

Nobody had noticed anything amiss. The papers were bundled and sent by conveyor to the delivery window, there to be loaded in taxis going to Dehra Dun, Ambala, Agra and other destinations, and then into our own vans for distribution in the city and suburbs. Readers, next morning, 'read' our blank editorial. They understood.

Blank editorials, blank columns, and quotations from Gandhi, Tagore, Lincoln and Jefferson, printed as our regular 'Thought for the Day', were soon banned. But stories of dictatorships in other countries, parables and book reviews with counter messages continued to get past the censors. Readers got the message. *The Times*, Bombay, carried an obituary notice reading: 'D.M. Ocracy—beloved husband of T. Ruth, loving father of L.I. Bertie, brother of Hope, Faith and Justica, expired on 26 June.' Many mourned the loss!

A government paper, 'Why Emergency', published by the home ministry was presented to Parliament on 21 July 1975. The apologia lacked even an iota of credibility. It spoke of the efforts of 'political parties with fascist leanings', 'frustrated politicians' and 'miscreants' to 'destroy the country's self-confidence and challenge the very basis of democratic functioning'. The government's attempt was, therefore, to put 'democracy back on the rails'.

*

The actual course of events over the preceding years and the first onslaught of the Emergency told another story. Censorship was the key. I can do no better than summarise my deposition before the Shah Commission appointed by the Janata government that came to power after the Emergency, filling out some of this with excerpts from a note I submitted to K.K. Dass, the new secretary at the information and broadcasting ministry, to assist his preparation of a White Paper on censorship of the media. Censorship, I said:

> . . . was far and away the single most important and viciously perverted instrument of the Emergency. In it was exhibited the deep fear, guilt and dishonesty that marked the arbitrary and even illegal exercise of State power for narrow, self-regarding

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> ends. The object of censorship was to keep the public in ignorance of what was happening in the country so as to instil fear and prevent protest snowballing into a movement that may have been extremely difficult to control. It was to stifle every form of dissent—individual, political, parliamentary and judicial. More particularly, it was used as an instrument of news management aimed at thought control. Facts were not merely suppressed but distorted, invented and mis-joined in an orchestration of untruth, vilification of political opponents and dissenters, and downright character assassination.

The entire gamut of the media was sought to be taken over and employed for this purpose with detailed directions from the very top. Fortunately, the manipulation was so excessive and so crude as to entail a steady loss of credibility, which gradually became near total. Yet, such is the danger of all-pervasive media control and news management that the truth seemed incredible, and was heavily discounted by those denied access to honest reportage of news and events.

Mrs Gandhi had long been convinced that independent organs of the press were hostile to the government. She repeatedly accused them of spreading lies and falsehood, sensationalism and of lowering national morale. She also charged them with denigrating the office of the prime minister and of 'guiding the Opposition', whatever that might mean. Not a single charge was ever substantiated. The rationale for censorship, of which she was the chief architect, assisted by Vidya Charan Shukla, Mohammad Yunus and an array of lesser functionaries and servitors, was spelt out in a speech she made in the Rajya Sabha on 22 July 1975. Mrs Gandhi said:

Once there were no newspapers there was no agitation. The agitation was in the pages of the newspapers. If you ask why there was censorship of the press, this is the reason why. If nothing else has proved it, this has proved it. I have no doubt that had the newspapers come out and started inciting people, as they did before and as unfortunately they have done at times of communal trouble, there would have been a terrible situation. Our task was to avoid such a situation and we did avoid it.

How was this done? Vidya Charan Shukla, in his very first meeting with Delhi editors, described the Emergency as the beginning of a new era. In future, no 'confrontation' would be permitted between the press and the government. He went on to explain that this meant the end of dissent and protest. He defended the censorship of the report that Nani

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Palkhivala had returned Mrs Gandhi's brief as her defence lawyer in the Allahabad case appeal, on the ground that this was a private matter and of no public interest whatsoever!

Censorship and news management was throughout arbitrary if not illegal. It was a mafia operation, enforced capriciously. Officials from the chief censor's office would call newspapers and issue oral instructions about what should not be published or, sometimes, what the ruling coterie wanted published, and how. As editor of the *HT*, I spoke and wrote to the chief censor and Shukla, demanding confirmation in writing. This was never forthcoming.

In July 1975, the Supreme Court commenced hearings on Mrs Gandhi's election petition appeal. The press was under instructions to use only the bald agency copy known to have been vetted by senior law officials of the government. The *HT* insisted on carrying the despatch of its own legal correspondent who gave a concise and faithful summary of the largely procedural arguments of the day. This alleged infringement of the censor's order and the publication earlier of two letters to the editor by Acharya Kripalani and Balraj Madhok (Jana Sangh) in the *HT* were made grounds for imposing pre-censorship, which required the clearance of copy before it was even typeset.

I protested to the authorities, analysed the censorship order and guidelines in writing and asked to know their legal basis. I met Shukla only to be told that it was no use indulging in legalities. Whatever the chief censor or his officials did or said was the law and there was no more to be said. The episode illustrates the ideology of censorship and the underlying reality of the Emergency. Pre-censorship was repeatedly employed to bludgeon and break papers that refused to conform.

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It is not without significance that every single petition moved before the courts by newspapers or journalists was upheld and official actions stigmatised as mala fide and arbitrary. On 25 November 1975, Justice R.P. Bhatt of the Bombay High Court held in M.R. Masani vs Binod Rao (the Maharashtra Censor) that 'the objectives mentioned in the (state) guidelines dated 5th August, 1975, apart from maintenance of public order, include stability of economic growth in the country, which in my opinion appears to be outside the ambit and scope of the Central Government Order itself.'

The Government of Maharashtra went in appeal before a division bench of the Bombay High Court. Justices Madon and Kania upheld the original judgment on nine out of eleven issues. Their Lordships said:

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> The Press is not only an instrument of dissemination of information but is also a powerful medium for moulding opinion by propaganda. True democracy can only thrive in a free clearing house of competing ideologies and philosophies, political, economic and social, and in this the Press has an important role to play. The day this clearing house closes down would toll the death-knell of democracy. It is not the function of the Censor, acting under the Censorship Order, to make all newspapers trim their sails to one wind or to tow along in a single file or to speak in chorus with one voice. It is not for him to exercise his statutory powers to force public opinion in a single mould or to turn the Press into an instrument of brainwashing the public. Under the Censorship Order, the censor is appointed the nursemaid of democracy not its grave digger. Dissent from the views and opinions held by the majority and criticism and disapproval of measures initiated by a party in power make for a healthy political climate, and it is not for the censor to inject into this the lifelessness of forced conformity.

On 22 March 1976, a division bench of the Gujarat High Court, allowed a petition by *Bhoomiputra*, a Baroda journal, against the chief censor, the Government of India and the state of Gujarat and struck down some sub-sections of the Government of India Censorship Order as ultra vires of Rule 48 of the Defence of India Rules and declared them void. Justices G.B. Mehta and S.G. Sheth noted:

> After the Central Government made Rule 48, the Central Government or the Chief Censor, one after the other, has taken strides after strides beyond the scope of Rule 48. The Chief Censor's guidelines, in our opinion, are thoroughly useless and worthless because the nation, which rises like an impregnable citadel above every individual or group of individuals, cannot be apron-stringed to the Chief Censor nor can its political education and sovereignty be moulded into the cast of the Chief Censor.

There could scarcely have been a more damning indictment. Even so, the government counsel desired that the judgment be censored. The court thereupon issued a separate oral order the following day in these ringing terms:

> We have held that under Rule 49 the Censor has no jurisdiction to censor Court proceedings and that Court proceedings do not

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and cannot incite people to violence or disturb public order or endanger public safety. Next, under our Constitution, the Court interprets the law and lays it down. The law we have laid down must hold good, at least until the Supreme Court takes a different view. The Censor cannot sit in judgment upon our decision and decide which law should be allowed to be made known to the public and which not. It is impossible for us to imagine that Court proceedings or the judgment of a court can ever amount to a 'prejudicial report' within the meaning of that expression as interpreted by us. The Censor is not above the Court. It is necessary for him to realise that he is subject to the jurisdiction of the Court. What we held ultra vires cannot be allowed to operate intra vires under the veil of secrecy. We cannot permit the liberty of the people to be under the weight of censorship. We are not inclined to do anything by which deprivation of liberty can be continued for a moment more. We therefore grant (counsel for *Bhoomiputra*) Mr Daru's request and direct respondents No. 1 (the Chief Censor), and No. 5 (the Union of India), their servants, agents and employees, to desist and forbear from censoring or withholding permission to print or publish this judgment or any part thereof.

The injunction was specific and absolute. Nevertheless, it was deliberately defied. The judgment was censored. A couple of papers that published summaries of the judgment were penalised. The Navjivan Press, which subsequently published the full text of the judgment, was sealed. The judges were punitively transferred and their transfer orders were subjected to censorship. A petition by one of the judges challenging the legality of his transfer was also censored. What this shows unmistakably is that the Censor was under orders to stop at nothing, the law and the Constitution notwithstanding.

One has only to read even an incomplete listing of the oral orders issued by the Censor's office to see the patent falsehood and perversity of the Emergency. Anything likely to provoke protest or controversy was subject to censorship. The campaign of forcible sterilisation and the demolition of jhuggies in Delhi, in cruel disregard of elementary human or legal rights, was totally censored. So was the police firing at Turkman Gate (in Delhi's Shahjehanabad), Muzaffarnagar, Faridabad, Nagina, Sultanpur, Pipli and elsewhere. The fencing and in-fighting in the Congress Party was censored when it suited the ruling clique but was disseminated and broadcast in a flood of words if a recalcitrant party

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member or chief minister had to be destroyed. The proceedings of Parliament and of the courts, including judgments, were censored. Even a speech made by the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, was censored. All political activity was, of course, censored.

Regional censors were soon in place but confusion reigned supreme. There was often double or triple censorship, with one centre censoring what another had approved, as orders came from above with local variations. For example, a copy cleared by the chief censor's office in Delhi would be further censored by state censors in Jullundur, who sat in each newspaper office. In other cases, strict adherence to censored copy offered no protection to individual papers on publication. *The Statesman* was put under pre-censorship in one instance for an editorial published after due scrutiny by the Calcutta censor.

Samachar (a forced amalgamation of four independent news agencies, including PTI and UNI, which had been brought under direct government control) was grossly abused as a prime instrument of news management. News was doctored from above and fed into Samachar. Newspapers were often told by the censor that only the Samachar version could be printed. There were specific cases of news management, such as the highlighting of a national survey that allegedly discovered popular jubilation 'from the snowy heights of Kashmir to the shimmering sands of Kanyakumari' following the official announcement of an indefinite postponement of the general elections that were due in the autumn of 1976!

Hearings in the case of Tulmohan Ram, the former Congress MP, defending changes of forgery in the Pondicherry licence scandal, were censored. Likewise, news of US Congressional hearings relating to Boeing payoffs in India. The conviction of certain accused in the Dalmia-Jain Airways scam, after proceedings spanning nearly two decades, was censored. Anything shady, anything seamy, anything against the national interest could be covered up by censorship, if the ruling clique thought this would further its own petty interests.

Untruths and half-truths were propagated. For instance, the prime minister publicly accused the Socialist trade union leader, George Fernandes, of seeking Chinese assistance for striking railway workers, in 1974. The truth is that he had led a demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi to protest against the reported repression of Chinese railway workers! While the papers and AIR gave full publicity to Mrs Gandhi's charges, they were prohibited from publishing or airing Fernandes' documented refutation, cyclostyled copies of which were circulated.

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A personality cult had been built around the prime minister. She could do no wrong, 'Indira being India'. Yet the legislation, hastily adopted, and retrospectively validating her 1971 Lok Sabha election (which had been impugned on grounds of corrupt practice), was shamefacedly censored for forty-eight hours and comment on it banned.

Mrs Gandhi, V.C. Shukla and H.R. Gokhale, the law minister, knowingly misled Parliament, the courts and the country about the fact of censorship and pre-censorship, which they pretended had been relaxed or did not exist. On the contrary, as the Emergency advanced and deteriorated into an open exercise in self-aggrandisement and dynastic succession through unconstitutional abuse of power, the apparatus of censorship and news management was increasingly and more blatantly employed.

Legislation was enacted to make censorship part of the ordinary law of the land. Thus, the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act and laws repealing the Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act, 1956—popularly known as the Feroze Gandhi Act after its prime mover, Feroze Gandhi (Mrs Gandhi's late husband)—and abolishing the Press Council were simultaneously enacted by Ordinance on 8 December 1975. The object of repealing the Feroze Gandhi Act was to fetter media reportage of parliamentary proceedings.

On the tenth anniversary of what was modestly labelled 'The Dynamic Decade', the official media went berserk in discovering new triumphs that had somehow eluded notice until that inspired moment.

Were this not enough, crude efforts were made to take over certain papers and journals and compel other independent journals to close. The chief censor was asked to convene a committee of editors to draft a model code of ethics that omitted reference to freedom of the press. Most of the editors resigned in disgust. There were a series of attacks on *The Indian Express* (Ramnath Goenka), *The Statesman*, *Patriot*, *Bhoomiputra* (Chunnilal Vaidya), *Sadhana* (S.M. Joshi), *Seminar* (Romesh and Raj Thapar), *Mainstream* (Nikhil Chakravartty), *Janata* (N.G. Goray), *Freedom First* (Minoo Masani), *Himmat* (Raj Mohan Gandhi), *Opinion* (A.D. Gorwala) and *Deshabhimani* (the CPM organ in Kerala). *The Eastern Economist*, and many other journals and individuals, were hounded. Thousands of others were denied access to printing presses, which were threatened if they dared accept business from those blacklisted.

The patent high-handedness and illegalities practised roused 223 journalists from Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Poona and Surat to write a letter of protest to Mrs Gandhi on 9 October 1976, expressing profound disquiet and concern over efforts to subvert and manipulate

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the media. Copies were sent to the President and Shukla. There was no response.

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No sooner had the Emergency been proclaimed than the distinction between party and State was obliterated. Congress Party hand-outs were distributed through the Press Information Bureau across the table and by post and the Department of Audio-Visual Publicity (DAVP) was used to reward or punish newspapers by sanctioning or withholding advertisements.

A vicious attack was mounted on the Press Council. Foreign newsmen were harassed and some were informed that they would be permitted to stay provided they took a 'pledge' to abide by certain guidelines. Most declined. Some left. The handling of the foreign press was not improved by the boorish intervention of Mohammad Yunus, who used a most denunciatory tone in criticising foreign governments and their heads, to the acute embarrassment of the external affairs ministry, where he held the rank of 'special envoy'.

Yunus's megalomania reached its height in a statement he made in Madras, in the latter half of 1976, in which he denounced the Madras edition of *The Indian Express* for failing to take adequate note of his presence in the city. *The Express* carried the statement the next day to its readers' merriment. Yet, while pretending to be unmindful of foreign press coverage, the government was in fact highly sensitive to it. Favourable foreign comment was widely circulated through Samachar, often with some doctoring. Thus a long interview with Mrs Gandhi by Norman Cousins, editor of *The Saturday Evening Review*, New York, was re-circulated in India, minus certain passages!

Films were censored. One famous incident related to *Kissa Kursi Ka*, a Sukhdev production on bonded labour that had an anti-Indira slant and was accordingly burnt under instructions from Sanjay Gandhi.

Books were censored too. Zareer Masani's biography of Mrs Gandhi was permitted to be sold, but without a postscript written after the declaration of the Emergency. Acharya Vinoba Bhave's gestures during his year of maun (silence) were 'interpreted' and officially propagated. But the moment he broke his silence, he too was censored. Even his journal, *Maitri*, had its press sealed for some time. The national motto, Satyameva Jayate, was eclipsed by dark forces, for twenty long months.

At a personal level, the Tandon *Diary* (Volume I) has an entry dated 3 July 1975, reading, 'Shukla wants to arrest the Editor of the *HT*, B.G. Verghese. The PM has not yet given her approval, though she is

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not averse to the idea. She wants some time to think it over.' Delhi's lieutenant governor, Krishan Chand, corroborated this in his evidence before the Shah Commission. He said lists of those to be detained under MISA were being made on the evening of 25 June. 'Names were being added and dropped. Shri K.D. Malaviya's and Shri B.G. Verghese's names figured in the list at one stage but got deleted later in the final list.' He added that every single name in the list was seen and approved by Mrs Gandhi. Later, on 12 August 1975, B.N. Tandon referred to a periodic review meeting on censorship conducted by the PM. P.N. Dhar, her principal secretary, kept insisting that censorship be eased, but Shukla was adamant. He said that most editors were happy with the situation. Only Nihal Singh of *The Statesman* and Verghese of the *HT* were defiant. But arrangements had been made to 'fix' them and that there was nothing to worry about.

The two major papers that fought the Emergency all the way were *The Indian Express* and *The Statesman*. The *Express* story has been told in my biography of the indomitable Ramnath Goenka, *Warrior of the Fourth Estate*, and is not detailed here only for that reason. But tribute must be paid to him for his spirit and leadership; and the rare courage and subtle tenacity of the editor, V.K. Narasimhan, who was appointed in his place when Mulgaonkar was eased out under official pressure. Goenka's maxim, when confronted with official roadblocks, was 'disobey and explain' rather than 'obey and complain'. He defied and used his wits and guile and sought the protection of the courts. Every kind of case was slapped on him, and there was a time when he was defending over a hundred suits. The crude effort by the government to take over *The Express* and place it under K.K. Birla's pliant guardianship was a saga in itself. Goenka cunningly turned the tables on the government and Birla, and emerged smiling.

The verdict on the role of the press during the Emergency was pronounced by L.K. Advani, the Janata government's information and broadcasting minister. He observed that 'the press was asked to bend; but it crawled'. That was perhaps an overly harsh indictment but not entirely untrue, barring exceptions. Virtually, the entire national press (barring *The Times of India*) had earlier run away from NEFA in 1962, and scurried out of Kashmir all through 1990 and even later, preferring to sound off from a safe distance, from Delhi or elsewhere. Post-1984, even the Punjab coverage by the national press (barring *The Express*), was skimpy. Individually, in all cases, young women reporters did far better. Things are, today, very different.

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It was not only the press that faltered during the Emergency. Many among the middle class and the intellectual and professional community came to terms with the new dispensation, having been brought up on the theory that democracy was essentially an end product of a long process of social and economic revolution, and could not be its instrument, which was what was being attempted in India. The experiment was unlikely to succeed, in the long run. They were proved wrong. It was the unwashed, hungry, deprived millions of India that voted out Mrs Gandhi in 1977.

As if to suggest that economic and social development had been impeded by agitation, and that the people's welfare would now be speedily promoted, Mrs Gandhi announced a Twenty-Point Programme. This included steps to bring down prices, enforce land ceilings and distribute surplus land; provide house sites for the landless; abolish bonded labour; declare a moratorium on rural debt; revise minimum wages; expand irrigation; launch an accelerated power programme; promote handloom development; impose urban land ceilings; launch a drive against economic offenders, ostentatious consumption and smugglers; liberalise investment, foster workers' association with industry; introduce national permits for road transport; grant the middle class income tax relief; control the prices of essential commodities supplied to student hostels; regulate book and stationery prices; and start new apprenticeship schemes. None of this required the declaration of an Emergency!

To this Sanjay Gandhi added his own Five-Point Programme. These included family planning, tree planting, eradication of illiteracy, abolition of dowry and caste, and a habitat programme that centred on slum clearance and improved housing. These were far more meaningful programmes, but it was the manner of implementation of some of these that caused terror and revulsion. The Shah Commission tells the story.

There was concern in the country as a whole at the runaway growth in population and its impact on every aspect of the nation's economic and social life. The emphasis was, however, on voluntary acceptance of family planning measures. Sterilisation had been introduced as an option and sterilisation camps had come to be organised. The Emergency brought about a change and, for the first time, the possibility, even desirability, of forced sterilisation was hinted at. Addressing a joint conference of the Associations of Physicians of India on 22 January 1976, Mrs Gandhi said: 'We must now act decisively and bring down the birth rate speedily to prevent the doubling of our population in a mere twenty-eight years. We should not hesitate to take steps which might be

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described as drastic. Some personal rights have to be kept in abeyance for the human rights of the nation, the right to live, the right to progress.'

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare was quick to echo this sentiment and indicated that pressure was necessary in view of the demographic situation. In 1975-76, the country achieved a total of 2.6 million sterilisations. The ministry then fixed a 'target' of 4.2 million sterilisations for 1976-77. This was competitively raised by several states to an overall figure of 6.1 million, while the actual achievement under a ruthless campaign, largely driven behind the scenes by Sanjay Gandhi, finally exceeded 8.1 million sterilisations. The health secretary kept urging that there should be no excesses. But his was a voice in the wilderness, and incentives and disincentives were introduced.

Sanjay Gandhi as a Youth Congress leader had taken command. He got into direct touch with several chief ministers in furtherance of his Five-Point Programme. To whip up an aura of national acceptance, the information and broadcasting minister directed the principal information officer, on 4 May 1976, 'to organise letters to the editor in various English, Urdu and language papers' in support of the family planning programme. State targets were broken down into district, block and village targets and officials and functionaries like teachers made responsible for their fulfilment on pain of not receiving their salaries or TA/DA, stoppage of increments and promotions, penal transfers and similar penalties. There was resentment and panic.

Haryana ordered 'eligible' government servants to get sterilised. Non-compliance would attract punishment under the Punjab Civil Service Rules. The Himachal agriculture minister warned staff that non-compliance would not be tolerated and that salaries would be withheld until a certificate of sterilisation was produced. In Rajasthan, the birth of a fourth child to a government servant was to be viewed as 'misconduct'. Suspensions and termination of service were reported in some cases and ration cards were withheld. Others found that permits, licences and benefits were kept pending and offenders declared ineligible for certain posts, such as that of lambardar or sarpanch.

The incentives for compliance included free blankets and similar goodies while disincentives included the withholding of house plots, housing or industrial loans and medical treatment in government hospitals. Punitive measures were not part of official policy but became routine and were passed off as 'gentle pressure'. People were herded into clinics and sterilisation camps to fulfil 'quotas' and 'targets'. Old men, unmarried youth, young bridegrooms and even boys were cruelly

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sterilised. Passengers were pulled off buses and operated. The family planning staff found all this most distasteful, but were petrified and dragooned into doing what they clearly thought was wrong. Hostility, in many cases, turned to violence. This was harshly dealt with and attributed to troublemakers and religious fundamentalists.

According to estimates collated from the states and furnished to the Shah Commission, 548 unmarried persons were forcibly sterilised, and 1774 deaths were reported from botched operations or subsequent infection on account of inadequate infrastructure and aftercare.

Under certain circumstances, action under DIR and MISA was recommended. The results were there to see. The Shah Commission recorded 62 detentions under MISA, 159 under DIR, 303 under the Indian Penal Code and 20 under the Criminal Procedure Code.

Deposing before the commission, the former minister for health and family planning, Dr Karan Singh, stated that family planning became synonymous with sterilisation and was brought into disrepute:

> At that time an extra-constitutional power was operating in the country, and chief ministers who owed allegiance to this centre vied with each other in raising their sterilisation targets in order to gain favour. Once the targets were raised, the whole force of the governmental machinery in those states was thrust into use to achieve them, and in the process an atmosphere of fear and coercion became widespread. Once again it was proved that howsoever desirable the ends may be, wrong means can lead to nothing but disaster.

One particular village of Uttawar in Gurgaon district, inhabited largely by Meos (Muslims), was seen as holding out, and was given special attention under the orders of Bansi Lal in order to bring them in line. Electricity to the village was cut on 12 October 1976. Then a large, heavily armed police contingent of 700 men raided the village under the leadership of the district collector and SP. Some 550 persons were carried away for interrogation and 180 were subsequently sterilised. There was no redress. Censorship drew a curtain around barbaric actions of this kind. Later, everybody pleaded ignorance.

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Demolitions for slum clearance caused almost as much grief, and this programme was also masterminded by Sanjay Gandhi in disregard of master plans, regulations, norms and human considerations.

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For some time, civic and public authorities in most parts of the country had been concerned with removing encroachments and slums, and launching beautification programmes to enhance the urban environment. Unauthorised roadside shanties were to be removed and national highways suitably renovated to reduce accidents. These measures were unobjectionable and generally welcomed. But, as in the case of the sterilisations, Sanjay Gandhi got into the act under his Five-Point Programme. A parallel line of command was established in several states and in Delhi, with fawning chief ministers anxious to please.

The Shah Commission noted that the actions taken were often ill-conceived and even inhuman. 'Thousands of people were uprooted after giving a few hours notice, often without warning and without remedy or compensation . . . ignoring the misery caused to men, women and children.' Sanjay told the UP resident commissioner, who had come to show him the state's urban development plans, that he wanted the streets of Agra and Varanasi to be cleared of beggars and cattle. Once again, complaints poured in from many quarters. Yet it was nothing compared to the resistance with which the scheme was met in Delhi, the epicentre of the demolition drive.

Prior to the Emergency, the policy in Delhi was that no clearance operations could be undertaken without the express permission of the prime minister. Moreover, no one was to be shifted without prior arrangements for the family's rehabilitation elsewhere. In some cases, Sanjay Gandhi had even stopped the approved demolitions of some newly constructed but unauthorised jhuggies in Chanakyapuri, Delhi's diplomatic enclave, as these had been patronised by his henchmen, to gain electoral advantage. With the declaration of the Emergency, slum clearance programmes received a great fillip as those affected could not mobilise public support, or seek redress in courts. The lieutenant governor pleaded helplessness as orders had come from 'above'. The Delhi municipal commissioner, B.R. Tamta, later confessed that he was threatened with dire consequences if he failed to execute the orders of Sanjay Gandhi.

There had been two long-standing plans to decongest the Jama Masjid and Turkman Gate areas in the Walled City of Delhi or Shahjehanabad. These had been carefully considered and approved two decades earlier by Maulana Azad and Nehru. They provided for the rehabilitation of the inhabitants in adjacent areas, with the assurance of far better living conditions and civic services.

These plans were now brushed aside to the consternation of old

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residents and heritage lovers. Kalan Mahal, Shahjehan's residence in the city until the Red Fort was completed, was demolished. Waqf properties were bulldozed. Rules were flouted. Stay orders were disregarded and those who approached the courts were arrested on false charges. Records were fabricated and rewritten. The operations were carried out like a blitzkrieg. (Among those who vanished from the scene during that maelstrom was Masita. His hot, delicately-soft kebabs, whose aroma wafted appetisingly across the great steps of the Jama Masjid, had long been a delight that gourmets from all over the city and further afield came to savour.)

The Turkman Gate area, part of the Delhi-Ajmeri Gate improvement scheme, was the scene of another tragedy. The first phase of the scheme had been peacefully completed in 1974, and displaced residents were shifted to an agreed relocation site. The second phase was rammed through with brute force, without proper preparation and warning.

The mishandling of the situation sparked panic and led to rioting. The police opened fire, and at least six persons were officially listed as having been killed in the firing. Unofficial figures placed the fatalities considerably higher. Rather than assuage inflamed sentiments, Sanjay Gandhi visited the scene and issued personal directions over the head of the lieutenant governor. Floodlights were installed and demolitions expedited with the aid of bulldozers working under curfew. The reason given was that the structures were unauthorised.

Further demolitions in Delhi took place at Bhagat Singh Market and Ghaffar Khan Market, both built to rehabilitate refugees from Pakistan, and in several outlying villages. A number of dwellings and authorised workshops and factories were also demolished 'on orders from higher authorities', along the Delhi-Gurgaon highway. The Shah Commission records that all structures on the left side of the Delhi-Gurgaon highway from Samalkha to Kapashera were demolished by a bulldozer that carried the legend, 'I am deaf and blind'. Those demolitions were carried out on the express directions of Sanjay Gandhi who was annoyed over having to negotiate the congestion, stray dogs and cattle en route to his Maruti factory in Gurgaon. Those apparently were the kind of considerations that weighed in his ordering of the savage and thoroughly illegal demolition orgy.

After my removal from *The Hindustan Times*, I was for a while editorial adviser to the Bombay weekly, *Commerce*, and had occasion to write for it on the Delhi demolitions in July 1976:

> The creation of a blighted million-sized city across the Yamuna and a vast, unpleasant urban-industrial sprawl, regrettably at

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variance with the approved National Capital Region Plan, appear to be the inevitable consequences of Delhi's post-Emergency urban resettlement programme, claimed to be the largest in the world. Four hundred thousand jhuggi-dwellers and others associated with non-conforming trades and industries have already been moved out for resettlement on 25-square yard plots in 27 colonies being developed with feverish haste around the periphery of the Capital, and another 200,000 persons are to be moved before the end of the year. Simultaneously, parts of historic Shahjehanabad are being redeveloped with a sad insensitivity towards the character and cultural ethos of the Walled City.

Of Delhi's displaced population of 600,000 under Phases I and II, roughly a third is being relocated in half a dozen trans-Yamuna colonies, the largest of which is ironically known as Khichripur. As several artisans among them have lost their avocations, markets or trade links partially or wholly, there is an immediate problem of economic rehabilitation. Delhi's non-conforming industries have also to be relocated somewhere. The Uttar Pradesh Government has eagerly seized the opportunity and has notified 30,000 acres just across the Delhi border where it is initially developing facilities for 10,000 small and medium enterprises under the aegis of the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA).

The philosophy underlying the National Capital Region Plan (1973) was to prevent the emergence of a Greater Delhi megalapolis with a population growing to 10-12 million by the end of the century. Instead, the focus would be on a 30,000 square kilometre NCR spread over UP, Haryana and Rajasthan within which 18 towns were recommended for priority development through industrial and administrative dispersal. A nexus was to be established between the metropolis and the regional growth centres by means of radial corridors and circular transport links that might hold down Delhi's population to around six to seven million.

This whole concept has been rudely by-passed by the NOIDA project. With UP crowding in on Delhi, to skim the cream of metropolitan proximity, Haryana may not be far behind. Unplanned development makes nonsense of regional planning. . .

The clearance of all of Delhi's unauthorised colonies is expected to enable the authorities to spot and evict fresh squatters

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> before they can dig in. But since the city receives an estimated 90,000 immigrants every year, where will they go? If strict vigilance is maintained within the inner city ring, future waves of squatters will settle in the new resettlement colonies . . . The decision to build whole townships of and for the poorest is likely to breed ghettoes that threaten grim social and political tensions in the future . . . If, as suggested in certain quarters, the cost of the resettlement colonies is to be reimbursed by auctioning land at high prices in the more affluent residential and commercials districts of the Capital, this might only accentuate the divide between the twin Delhis of the rich and the poor. Perhaps something could yet be done to ameliorate what could otherwise translate into an unmitigated urban disaster . . .

The excesses of the Emergency included arbitrary detentions, one of the victims being the venerable Bhim Sen Sachar, a former chief minister of Punjab and a respected Gandhian. Private scores were settled. Those who went to overcrowded jails sometimes found even basic amenities denied, as a means of additional harassment. It was a method used to bend proud men and women until they were reduced to offering abject apologies, which would then be widely publicised.

The Shah Commission sadly observed that many public servants failed to do their duty and to live up to their oath. They pleaded intimidation, pressure and orders from above that they were powerless to resist. They were compelled to execute oral and telephonic orders that were never, subsequently, confirmed in writing. Enormous powers were wielded by extra-constitutional functionaries presided over by Sanjay Gandhi.

Mrs Gandhi could not plead ignorance. She directed certain measures and connived at others despite her public protestations, preaching virtues that she would have punished if practised, as seen from the Tandon *Diaries*. There was a climate of fear. Power and responsibility were separated. There was no judicial redress as judges were hounded and judgments censored. Sixteen justices of various high courts were transferred without their consent. These were punitive transfers of judges who showed integrity, independence and courage. As many as 25,962 public servants were compulsorily retired and of those as many as 14,187 were reinstated after the Emergency.

Parliament was muzzled by the detention of a large number of Opposition MPs, censorship, and a twisting of rules and procedures. Notices for the monsoon session should have gone out by the time the

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Allahabad High Court judgment was delivered on 12 June 1975. The government was, however, chary of calling a session until it was 'safe' to do so. On 21 June, Opposition leaders met the Speaker, G.S. Dhillon, seeking an early session in order to be able to discuss the situation arising out of the Allahabad judgment. Nothing was heard from the Speaker even as national executives of the Congress (O), Jana Sangh, BKD (Charan Singh), Socialist Party and Akali Dal met to forge a People's Front.

With the declaration of the Emergency on 26 June, the Central Hall of Parliament had grown surcharged with suspicion and mistrust. Central Hall passes to the press and MLAs were withdrawn. Parliament was finally summoned to meet on 21 July. All other business was suspended, and the government rushed to pass a resolution approving the promulgation of the Emergency.

Not a line of what the Opposition said appeared in the newspapers. The censor had received 'guidelines' that only ministerial speeches should be passed for publication. Convinced of the futility of their attendance, the Opposition withdrew from Parliament on 23 July. With Mrs Gandhi's appeal against the Allahabad High Court order coming up for hearing in the Supreme Court on 11 August, the government went into overdrive to place her above the law.

The 39th Constitution Amendment Bill was drafted to grant the PM immunity from any case in any court of law, with retrospective effect. This was introduced in the Lok Sabha at 11 a.m. on 7 August, was moved at 11.08 a.m. after all objections were overruled, and passed by 1.50 p.m. after completing three readings. The bill was adopted by the Rajya Sabha the next day in even less time. Special sessions of state legislatures were summoned and the bill ratified by the requisite number of legislatures. The President gave his assent and the Supreme Court was presented with a fait accompli on 11 August.

Parliament was prorogued and the government thereafter amended MISA, by ordinance, to ban disclosure of grounds of detention even to judges. As Era Sezhiyan, the DMK MP, put it pithily, the country now had a fully 'guided democracy'. Since DMK rule in Tamil Nadu was a thorn in the flesh of Mrs Gandhi, that government was dismissed in due course and the state placed under President's Rule.

The state legislatures were subject to similar restraints as Parliament. Nothing was left to chance.

When the Lok Sabha was called into session on 21 July 1975, the visitors' galleries were practically empty but the diplomatic gallery was overflowing. Mrs Gandhi withdrew from the chamber whenever there

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was 'voting' as she was disqualified from exercising a vote under the Allahabad High Court order. The Kashmir MP, Shamin Ahmed Shamin (Independent), was cheered by the Congress benches for chiding the Opposition for advancing petty arguments and points of order, when Mrs Gandhi had declared that they must know that they were living in a 'new India', where everything had changed. But the cheers faded as soon as it dawned on the embarrassed Congressmen that Shamin was in reality lampooning the Emergency!

The scandalous retrospective legitimisation of the corrupt electoral practices followed by Mrs Gandhi was only the beginning. Proposals were floated advocating a more centralised system of governance, including the adoption of the presidential system. Even some well-meaning liberals like B.K. Nehru, then high commissioner in London, favoured such a change. Fortunately, the idea did not take hold. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia and others had made the switch at various times, only to rue the consequences. More dangerous were a series of laws and constitutional amendments that would, in effect, have vested the prime minister with presidential powers.

An early horror was the utterly disgraceful plea made by the attorney general, Niren De, before the Supreme Court that the right to personal liberty was neither a common law right nor a natural or statutory right. He went so far as to argue that, given the Emergency proclamation under Article 359, there was no right of habeas corpus and that were an official to deprive a citizen of his liberty or even shoot him, the citizen would have no remedy. Soli Sorabjee, Ram Jethmalani, Anil Divan and other counsel challenged this view but to no avail. Their Lordships, Chief Justice A.N. Ray and Justices Beg, Bhagwati and Chandrachud, astonishingly went along with this extraordinary plea. Only Justice H.R. Khanna firmly dissented, to his lasting credit.

If the many could be deprived of life and liberty by whim, the 39th Constitutional Amendment Bill was singularly designed to place one person, Mrs Gandhi, above the law. The bill provided that no civil or criminal proceedings shall lie against the prime minister, President or any governor in respect of any act committed before, during or after demitting office even if done in his or her personal capacity. The immunity was to be absolute and lifelong. The very introduction of such an obnoxious bill suggested a deep sense of fear and guilt. Curiously, however, having passed the bill in the Upper House, the government was in no hurry to hasten its passage through the Lok Sabha.

Meanwhile the government was busy with designing virtually a new constitution in the form of the 44th Constitution Amendment Bill that

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was introduced in September 1976. The objective was to place the Directive Principles above Fundamental Rights (in order to hasten a social and economic revolution), curtail judicial review, prevent vaguely defined anti-national activities being made justiciable, or liable to trial in a court of justice. This, in effect, meant that people could be thrown into prison without trial for such 'activities' without the right to move a habeas corpus petition in court, ostensibly in order to preserve the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country.

If power corrupts, here was a case of absolute power corrupting absolutely. As many as 46 out of 393 articles were amended and several new ones introduced. Its effect would be to negate the Supreme Court's Keshavananda Bharati doctrine (which held that certain 'basic features' of the Constitution could not be amended). In effect, it would permanently enthrone the Emergency regulations as the basic law of the land.

The 44th Amendment represented the Emergency's darkest hour for, once adopted, it would drastically curtail fundamental freedoms and individual rights, further tilt the balance in favour of an immensely strong Centre, destroy the careful system of checks and balances envisaged by the Founding Fathers, and circumscribe the powers of the judiciary and the President. This would leave behind an omnipotent central executive with untrammelled powers, unfettered by legislative or judicial restraint. To overturn any law on constitutional grounds would require a two-thirds majority of a larger bench. The writ jurisdiction of the courts was whittled down.

Earlier, in 1951, Article 31B had been legislated to protect zamindari abolition and other land reform legislation by listing them in a new Ninth Schedule that constitutionally placed them beyond challenge. Eighty-four land related laws were placed in the Ninth Schedule until 1974. But since the Emergency, 101 Acts had been added to this list, many of them like MISA, the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act, the Motor Vehicles Act and various nationalisation measures bearing no relation to agrarian reform.

The President was reduced to a complete figurehead, a rubber stamp, with no powers to live up to his oath 'to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution'. State rights were curtailed by expanding the Concurrent List and assuming unfettered powers for deploying central forces anywhere in the country.

By an extraordinary provision, the 44th Amendment Bill vested the government with power (for a period of two years) to amend any part of the Constitution, by order, if it was felt 'necessary or expedient' to do

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so for the purpose of removing any difficulty in giving effect to the provisions of the amended Constitution. Thus, the parent Constitution was expected arbitrarily to fit into the 44th Amendment. The concept of an Emergency limited to certain parts of the country was introduced. But the catch was that Emergency powers could then be applied to any other part of the country as well.

The life of the Lok Sabha and all state legislatures was extended by one more year to six years even as Parliament was robbed of all power. The purpose, quite clearly, was to avoid elections and reference to the will of the people in whose name the executive had assumed absolute sovereignty. Quite clearly, much of the 44th Amendment Bill was borrowed from Alice in Wonderland.

The argument that the Directive Principles needed to be defended was a red herring. Early in 1976, the Supreme Court constituted a 13-judge bench to review the Keshavananda Bharati case. The then Attorney-General maundered on and on causing the Chief Justice to dissolve the Bench as the arguments seemed to be 'in the air'. The government was unfazed and set up a drafting committee under Swaran Singh, to propose suitable amendments.

Eminent men and women, jurists, academics, writers and cultural workers, separately petitioned the President, prime minister and Speaker against rushing through what morphed into the 44th Amendment Bill, but the Emergency juggernaut rolled on. It was enacted as the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, but was later substantially unscrambled by the Janata administration.

*

Among the draconian measures introduced during the Emergency was the Press Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act, 1976. Objectionable matter was defined as anything likely to excite disaffection against the government, cause public disorder, interfere with essential supplies, seduce the armed forces, promote disharmony or cause public fear or alarm or incite violence; or was defamatory, indecent or scurrilous. Punishment included seizure of the offending material, fines, imprisonment and sealing of the press. All this was over and above censorship.

Media persons countrywide wrote to the prime minister protesting against the unethical methods being employed to silence the press. There was no response.

Yet voices of dissent could not be stilled. (See Appendix 3) An underground 'press' developed—India's own Soviet-style *samizdat*—

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from all manner of places and in a variety of formats including wall writings. *Satya Samachar* was cyclostyled and distributed by the Central Lok Sangharsh Samiti, JP's national people's front. It reported Vinoba Bhave's growing disillusionment with the Emergency and his plan to convene an Acharya Sammelan on 2 October 1976 to take stock of the situation. The Jana Sangh MP, Subramanian Swamy, who had gone underground, created a sensation by stealing into the Rajya Sabha while it was in session, signing the attendance register and then, like Pimpernel, disappearing as mysteriously as he had appeared.

Jayaprakash Narayan had been released from detention owing to a kidney ailment. Prior to that, he had written Mrs Gandhi a moving letter from Chandigarh prison, on 21 July 1975.*

> I have written . . . in utter frankness, without mincing words . . . only to place the naked truth before you . . . You know I am an old man. My life's work is done. After Prabha's going [a reference to the death of his wife], I have nothing and no one to live for . . . So I shall be content to die a prisoner under your regime.
>
> Would you listen to the advice of such a man? Please do not destroy the foundations that the Fathers of the Nation, including your noble father, had laid down . . . You inherited a great tradition, noble values and a working democracy. Do not leave behind a miserable wreck of all that . . . A people who fought British imperialism and humbled it cannot accept indefinitely the indignity and shame of totalitarianism. You have talked of drift in the country . . . The drift was because of your lack of decision, direction and drive . . . Dear Indiraji, do not identify yourself with the nation. You are not immortal. India is . . .
>
> Let me assure you that if you do the right things . . . you will receive the willing cooperation of every one of us. For that you need not destroy democracy . . . With these parting words, let me bid you farewell. May God be with you.

JP spoke for India. His words fell on deaf ears.

*

*This was later included in an interesting anthology, *The Janata (People's) Struggle*, a compilation of underground documents, resistance literature and correspondence relating to the advent of the Janata Party, and was published in 1977 by Dhirendra Sharma, then of the JNU.

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As the weeks became months, the trains, as in Mussolini's Italy, continued to run on time. But every other value was hollowed out. International opinion, always sceptical, was becoming openly critical, with close friends like Dorothy Norman and Kingsley Martin urging Mrs G to review the situation. Government sympathisers and Congress Party members were increasingly worried about what was going on and, while shouting hosannas in public, began to express concern and dissent privately. The states were restive. Barring sycophants in the bureaucracy and media—and there were still some ardent drummer boys—men and women were sullen and deeply resentful, especially civil servants who had been made to lie and abuse their authority, to do the dirty work of a coterie whose venality and petty self-aggrandisement were being increasingly exposed.

Even people in high places were afraid to talk; fear and mistrust stalked the corridors of power. Few doubted that nemesis could not be far. Mrs Gandhi gradually began to sense that in the vast prison that India had become, she too was in solitary confinement. There were very few to whom she could turn for she had nothing but contempt for her senior colleagues, all of them fading doormats. Sanjay was out of control. She was worried. She was later to tell the spiritual leader, Jiddu Krisnamurti, to whom she turned for solace, that she was riding a tiger but did not know how to dismount it. She feared things could get out of hand.

Why, in the midst of all this, she called for elections remains an enigma. Madhu Limaye, a bitter critic, believed she yearned for legitimacy. Possibly, the democratic spark that informed her whole upbringing had begun to burn. Close aides like P.N. Dhar and friends like Pupul Jayakar urged her to call for elections in the expectation that by holding a dialogue with the Opposition mediated by JP, and the passage of some months to provide a healing touch, she would be returned to office.

The life of Parliament was further extended but the turn of the year saw her reverse gear. Pakistan was going to the polls. Could India remain behind? Hers was a split personality. She possibly listened to her inner 'voices' and called for general elections. The announcement was made on 18 January 1977. The news electrified the nation.

Thrown into prison together, Opposition leaders had begun to talk. They had come to know one another and discussed how they might confront Mrs Gandhi's Emergency. By early 1976, they were convinced that Opposition unity was of the essence. The discussions in Tihar Jail, Delhi, were continued in Bombay and a committee was set up to frame

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a policy and programme. The name Janata Party was suggested. Whereas the others were for the announcement of the new party, followed by a merger of the constituent units, Charan Singh, UP's Jat leader of the Bharatiya Lok Dal, proposed that the sponsoring parties be immediately merged in the new party, and that no member of the RSS (banned at the time) be admitted, and none in the new party should associate with it. Charan Singh also insisted that the on-going movement against the Congress and government must be suspended, and that the focus should shift from an agitational to a constitutional plane. However, JP had already formed a reorganised Lok Sangharsh Samiti under S.M. Joshi and it took some time to resolve the ensuing contretemps.

The Sarvodaya-Gandhian movement had polarised around Vinoba and JP during the Emergency with Vinoba supporting Mrs G. Meanwhile, though the RSS had supported JP's movement in Bihar, the RSS chief, Balasaheb Deoras, wrote a letter to the PM and another to Vinoba Bhave, in August and November 1975 congratulating Mrs G on winning her election petition. More startling was his private dissociation from the Bihar movement and his offer of unstinted cooperation to the government's constructive Twenty-Point Programme. These letters were printed for circulation among Jana Sangh and RSS workers and caused consternation when their contents became more widely known.

Charan Singh also saw a contradiction in JP's seeking to continue the struggle. In an interview given by JP to the journal *Swaraj*, published from Surrey, England, as early as 12 February 1976, he said that Mrs Gandhi was behaving like Hitler, and had he suspected she would or could so easily snuff out democracy he would have acted differently. 'I think I would not have gone as far as non-cooperation, non-payment of land and other taxes, which I advocated, but would have paid more attention to elections and preparing for them ... I did not realise that the result of my advocacy (of direct action) would be that the country would be saddled with dictatorship.' JP was ready to admit his mistakes and express regret for sometimes acting in haste. But, as he told Madhu Dandavate, an old socialist colleague, in Patna in January 1977, he did not favour the suspension of the agitation or dissolution of the Sangharsh Samiti until the Emergency was revoked and civil liberties restored. Nor did he think it right on the part of the PM to humiliate the Opposition if she desired constructive talks.

The announcement of general elections spurred the final formation of the Janata Party under JP's leadership, with Morarji and Acharya Kripalani as party 'elders', Chandrashekhar as president, and general

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secretaries drawn from each of the constituent units, L.K. Advani being one of them.

*

The country was jubilant; but Congressmen were bewildered and worried at what they were reading and hearing, as conversation resumed and censorship eased and then finally lifted. Anxiety deepened as Jagjivan Ram and H.N. Bahuguna jumped ship to form a new party, Citizens for Democracy (CFD), and criticised Mrs Gandhi for the ills the country had suffered as a result of the Emergency.

The Janata constituents huddled to formulate their individual and collective stands. The first order of business was to tour the country and get acquainted with what had happened during the dark interregnum. The Janata Party's framework and election manifesto had to be put together and many professionals, intellectuals, social activists and others who had rallied to oppose the Emergency were seen as natural allies of the new party and invited to participate even if they did not formally opt for membership. I was among that category and fell to the task of assisting in formulating and writing the party's election manifesto.

I was invited to the conclave that discussed the manifesto over more than one session. Emotion was high; ideas few. With Rajni Kothari, Raj Krishna and others, I helped furnish and flesh out the content and supplied the title, 'Both Bread and Liberty: A Gandhian Alternative'. The opening paragraphs set the tone:

> The forthcoming Lok Sabha poll constitutes the most crucial election that the country has had since Independence. The choice before the electorate is clear. It is a choice between freedom and slavery; between democracy and dictatorship; between abdicating the power of the people or asserting it; between the Gandhian path and the way that has led many nations down the precipice of dictatorship, instability, military adventure and national ruin . . .
>
> History is replete with instances where those who conspire against the rights of the people attempt to undermine freedom by portraying it as a luxury dear only to those who wish to defend property and privilege. They cleverly conceal the fact that fundamental freedoms are weapons that the oppressed and the poor need to fight tyranny, exploitation and injustice, vested interests and opportunist governments. Bread cannot be juxtaposed against Liberty. The two are inseparable.

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The manifesto traced the unfolding of the Emergency and exposed its false premises and claims to success. Noting the danger of excessive centralisation, it advocated a polity that ensured decentralisation of economic and political power, the maximisation of individual initiative and popular participation. It promised restoration of liberal constitutional values, autonomy for broadcasting, agrarian reform, a dynamic approach to rural development, a national water policy with water budgeting and water audit, an end to destitution within a decade, the reform of the education and health sectors, women's rights and steps to eradicate corruption.

*

As the election bustle got under way, a broader alliance was forged among all democratic and anti-Emergency forces including the CPM. No more was said about the former Jana Sangh's association with the RSS or dual membership. Despite some scepticism, it was assumed that the RSS or Sangh Parivar had turned a new leaf. As the rush for nominations intensified, word came from Kerala that the combined Opposition, under the leadership of the CPM's E.M.S. Namboodripad, had decided to offer four seats, Trivandrum, Mavelikara, Ottapalam (Trichur) and Calicut, to Independents.

I was invited to stand from one of those seats. K.N. Raj, founder-director of the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, and the Reverend M.M. Thomas, who had just returned after serving as secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, were also approached. Like them, I declined, pleading that I was not in politics and that I had neither the organisation nor the funding. Advani, now a Janata general secretary, advised otherwise. He said I should go to Kerala, meet EMS, consult my family and friends and then make up my mind.

I accordingly flew down to Cochin, leaving behind Jamila to shepherd the children through their approaching examinations. I recited my piece to EMS who silenced me with the fact that I was currently unemployed as there was no room for independent journalism in a regimented society. This was no ordinary election but a referendum on freedom versus tyranny. Thus stated, I decided to take the plunge but as an Independent candidate. EMS said the combined Opposition would work for me and that money would come from family, friends and those who believed in press freedom, which should be my platform. As for the constituency, he said Mavelikara would be best as this had a concentration of my community of Syrian Christians and included my family home, Tiruvalla. Jamila had approved.

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I recalled my electoral foray in the third person in an article* that reflected the flavour of the campaign and the outcome:

> The election (in Mrs Gandhi's calculus) was to be a surprise, aimed at securing legitimacy before fear departed and the disorganised ranks of the Opposition could rally. The surprises never ended. JP sounded a clarion call. The Janata Party was formed. The CFD broke away. The Opposition combined. The people rose to defend freedom. There was no mistaking the resurgent hope and expectation. This was the last chance.
>
> The call came from Kerala. He was reluctant. He was a journalist, not a politician. He did not belong to any party. He was unknown in Kerala, having always lived outside it. His friends however did not let the matter rest. Why not New Delhi or even Chandigarh or Bombay? These urban centres would surely return someone pledged to press freedom, they said. Should they go ahead and canvass one or other of these? Informal soundings had been made and the response was not unfavourable. He laughed away these promptings as idle talk, his vanity secretly tickled. No, he was not seeking a constituency.
>
> Kerala called again. Would he not reconsider his decision? He was requested to fly down to Cochin ...
>
> The Independence struggle had awakened millions to the politics of nationalism. Now, under the Emergency, what we were engaged in was a second freedom struggle, no less. Yes, this was no ordinary election, but a referendum. Without freedom there could be no honest journalism. Remember Tagore: 'Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high ...' This had been censored in June 1975. The cause was greater than person or Party. And, freedom being indivisible, there was truly only a single constituency—India.
>
> By the time the plane landed in Cochin, he knew he was going to stand. They assured him ... lack of fluency in Malayalam would also not matter since the Kerala electorate would be more concerned with what was being said than with the language in which it was spoken. After all, Krishna Menon and, earlier, K.B. Menon, the Socialist leader, had campaigned in English and been returned.

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*See 'The Candidate', in the India International Centre's *India Quarterly*, April 1977.

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He stepped beyond journalism and signified his consent . . . The local press was personally hospitable. The Candidate was written up with sympathy and presented as one campaigning for press freedom.

In Kerala every single party had splintered—Congress, Communists, the Kerala Congress, Muslim League, RSP, et al. Both the ruling Congress-CPI coalition and the combined Opposition front had seven constituents, virtual mirror images of one another. Each parliamentary constituency in the State comprised seven Assembly constituencies. For Mavelikara, the distribution of seats among the Candidate's Assembly running mates was Marxist three; Kerala Congress (Balakrishna Pillai group) three; Janata Party one.

The ruling coalition's candidate for Mavelikara was the last to be announced. He was a ranking INTUC leader (B.K. Nair), supported, among others by the NDP, the political wing of the Nair Service Society. The third candidate was a political representative of the SRP, the political wing of the SNDP, the Ezhava (backward class) association.

The Candidate's decision was acclaimed by his family (in Tiruvalla and Kottayam). Marriages and funerals bring families together. This time the Candidate's election (prospects) brought about the reunion. He was deeply touched by the groundswell of encouragement and financial support from friends, unknown sympathisers and journalists, not from Kerala alone but from almost every part of the country.

A national committee was formed in Delhi, with branches elsewhere, to raise funds. The response was emotionally overwhelming. The Candidate had made known his determination not to spend a paisa beyond the stipulated legal limit of Rs 35,000 and stood over-subscribed within 10 days of the appeal for funds. (The surplus was later invested in constituting the nucleus of The Media Foundation, devoted to upholding freedom and independence of the media and promoting professional standards, for which the election donations, largely in amounts of one and two rupees, were in fact intended).

Apart from Party and family support, the Candidate found that large numbers of non-party, even non-political sympathisers were working for him, openly or quietly. Teachers, students, radical clergy, lawyers, journalists and others formed teams to

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speak, canvass, organise, educate voters on the issues involved, and to tell the people about the Candidate. Friends and strangers came from distant places to campaign for him. This again was very moving.

The Candidate suddenly found himself anointed a 'leader' His name and bicycle symbol were emblazoned on walls, streets, banners and posters, and echoed to the *zindabads* of processionists and mike-vans that shattered the peace of the lush, undulating countryside. He was an object of curiosity and pride. People would point to him or come up and greet him. The affection was unmistakable.

The campaign managers decided that the first thing to do must be to introduce the Candidate to the constituency—some 1000 square miles in area, with a population of about 1.2 million. Programmes were chalked out to visit opinion leaders and institutions, hold street corner meetings and address public rallies in every one of the 56 panchayats. The Candidate, dressed in *mundu* and *kurta*, would speak a sentence or two in Malayalam and then switch to English with the help of an interpreter. Translation involved problems of time, continuity, direct communication and, sometimes, accuracy. Some of the interpreters, being thoroughly familiar with what the Candidate had been saying, would tend to run ahead of him! But with a good interpreter, rapport was immediately established. Nevertheless the audiences were most kind and attentive and the Candidate was never once heckled. Indeed, crowds would gather and remain for 30 to 90 minutes in sun or rain or long into the night. They wanted to hear.

Meetings would start at any time after 9 a.m. and continue until 9, 10 or 11 p.m. or even until 1 a.m. the next morning. Then there was the long drive home to Tiruvalla. The largest audiences might total some thousands, seated under palms or crowding shop fronts and spilling on to the streets at one or two town junctions; otherwise some hundreds. An average of 10 to 15 meetings was routine, rising to 25 on a single day in the Chengannur Assembly constituency. Floral, paper, cloth and yarn garlands would be presented by Party units, trade unions, associations and select individuals. The Candidate would respond with a speech. On the same Chengannur round, 'Bashir of the Opposition Muslim League' seemed to figure in every reception line. He would garland the Candidate, quietly retrieve

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the green cloth sash and then cycle furiously to the next venue, there to perform his act again before dashing off to be in line for the next engagement. Dear Bashir. He was really heroic.

Notices announcing the Candidate's programme would be circulated in advance ... A loudspeaker taxi would announce (his approach), his actual arrival being heralded by a second mike-van, immediately preceding his own car, introducing him and his platform. People would come out of their homes or shops to line the roadway, or lean over their compound walls to catch a glimpse of this political advertisement. They would point him out to one another. He would smile and wave, greeting his constituents with folded hands. There would more often than not be an answering smile, a wave, a *namaskaram* or a nod from curious men, shy women, gesticulating children, and Party workers, all proudly possessive of their candidate. Yes, here were the 'people' in whose name the Candidate had begun to talk. Perhaps more was communicated in a single smile, both ways, along the road, than in the speeches that so many could not hear and perhaps did not fully understand.

Everyone wanted to see if not hear the Candidate. His car would be stopped and he would step out into full view to be cheered and patted. 'That's our Candidate', they would exclaim. He was in some strange way their champion and hope. The thought humbled him.

There were pressures and questions too. Demands for support to particular claims, or for promises of what the Candidate would do for the constituency. Why had he come to Mavelikara? If elected, would he return? Visits to VIPs, schools, colleges, bar councils, orphanages, convents, old-age homes, a highly politicised leprosy home, hospitals, vicarages and a fishermen's colony were arranged. And the Candidate was a tearless mourner at two funerals. Electioneering can be uncomfortably brazen! Then there were processions led by the Candidate and his running mates in which rhythmic chants denouncing dictatorship and consigning the Emergency to the Arabian Sea were punctuated with cries of 'Inquilab Zindabad!' with clenched fists punching the air.

The Candidate addressed two Press Club meetings and some hall meetings where he sought to project larger and relatively more complex issues to a more sophisticated audience. But how was he to communicate ideas of freedom to simple

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peasants? The Emergency had touched Kerala lightly. Of course, there had been arrests and censorship, but nothing on the scale witnessed in the North. Nor had there been any compulsory sterilisation or demolition of huts. Sanjay Gandhi had not been allowed to set foot in the State. On the other hand, the Kerala ruling coalition could boast of stability, a relatively honest administration (under CPI's Achuta Menon) and a fairly good record of programme implementation. With the Emergency, daily bandhs and hartals were a thing of the past, schools and colleges functioned normally, and a measure of order and quiet had been restored to daily life. With a good agricultural season and bulging Central food stocks, the price of rice had been appreciably lowered. The ruling coalition also invoked the prospect of violence should the Marxist slogan 'EMS '57, EMS '67, EMS '77' be realised because middle class fear of the Marxists was indeed widespread and had been fanned.

The Candidate reduced his country chats and wayside speeches to a formula. The issue, he said, was freedom. Under the Emergency, everyone had lost the right to speech, association and justice. Tens of thousands had been jailed. The ruling party's slogan that less liberty would mean more bread was a most dangerous illusion. There was no conflict between bread and liberty. Both were basic human rights, and inseparable. Indeed, far from fundamental and political rights being something of value only to the intelligentsia and the rich, they were the only instruments given to the poor with which to defend and enlarge their economic interests and secure social justice. He spoke of rural unemployment that was driving tens of thousands to the cities where their already low living standards were being further depressed with higher living costs in the absence of either jobs or housing . . .

Alas, in the sylvan Kerala setting, Delhi appeared far away . . . The Emergency seemed remote. Stories of demolition of huts, forced sterilisations by the ruling party, total censorship, illegal and unconstitutional actions piled one on top of the other made sensational listening but seemed to lack credibility. What was unbelievable could certainly not be true. Every election brings in a crop of sensation. This time the horror stories were even more spine-chilling. All very entertaining after a hard day's work but to be discounted as election rhetoric. Nothing like this had happened in Kerala. Nothing like this had been

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reported in the papers or broadcast over radio. Of course, there may have been some excesses. She had admitted that and had promised to take action against the guilty. What more was there to be said?

The Candidate would sometimes carry the day's papers with him and answer points made by national Congress leaders to encourage debate. In the absence of local press coverage this was not picked up. The ruling coalition stuck to the line of discipline and local stability. The State's record was cited. The criticism of the Emergency and the atrocities committed in its name were dismissed as malicious distortions and untruths. The Candidate was derided as having been born in Burma, educated in the North, married to a Punjabi, unable to speak Malayalam. He was uncomfortable in a mundu, maybe was not even a rice eater, and altogether a rank outsider. He was said to be a money-bag and a CIA agent. The coverage he received from foreign press and TV correspondents was cited as open proof of this dangerous connection! The Candidate himself found these remarks too absurd to repudiate, though his running mates staunchly defended and eulogised him.

What was tragic and frightening was that a climate of fear and censorship had almost succeeded in brainwashing a whole segment of Indian society to a point that evoked disbelief when the truth was told. The minorities voted for the ruling coalition; the middle class for 'stability' and against the prospect of Marxist violence . . .

Yet another factor militated against the Opposition. The Janata Party did not appear a credible alternative in the South, certainly not in Kerala. None of its constituent units, nor the CFD, had a significant presence, if they existed at all. To talk of the Janata's potential seemed like adding zero to zero . . .

Voting on March 19 was heavy—over 82 per cent. As usual in Kerala, women outnumbered men. The combined Opposition was worried. A particularly high turn-out could signify that a substantial section of non-political voters had voted for the ruling coalition. Others had warned that that the SRP candidate would split the Marxists' Ezhava vote while the NDP would pull Nair votes to the Congress and Christians and Muslims would vote against the Candidate because of his Marxist-cum-Janata (Jana Sangh) support. In the event they were proved right.

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Counting on March 20 was slow. The Mavelikara counting was spread over four *talukas* and was to be totalled with the postal ballots at the district headquarters, Aleppey. The Candidate visited each of the counting centres en route to Aleppey. Counting of the 5600 postal ballots commenced there at 2 p.m. and concluded only at 7.45 a.m. the next morning. By 6 p.m. on the 19th, however, the Assembly trend was known, and this strongly favoured the ruling coalition. Outside the Aleppey Collectorate, exuberant Congress crowds broke into cheers and jeers. People raced around, emitting whoops. Crackers were let off. Victory processions formed. Excitement mounted. A light drizzle only momentarily dampened enthusiasm.

By 8 p.m. the national results started flowing in: Bansi Lal defeated by a margin of 1.61 lakh votes; Congress routed in Delhi; Opposition candidates returned from Bombay; Mrs Gandhi trailing; Sanjay Gandhi trailing; and the giant Janata wave rolling across the Gangetic plain.

Slowly the local jubilation faltered and then faded into anxious questioning. The victory celebrations were called off. Something big, something incomprehensible had happened. This was Kerala's moment of truth. There could only be one explanation. The ugly Emergency was real. What the Opposition had said all along was not mere bluff.

The results continued to come in through that memorable night. The Candidate had a pocket transistor and at the hour, every hour, he would step outside the counting hall to tune into the election bulletin. Knots of officials and counting agents on both sides gathered around. Strangely, everybody seemed relieved.

At daybreak the last postal ballots were still being counted after the enormously complicated process of verification and sorting. The ruling coalition had been returned to power in Kerala and the Opposition had failed to win a single one of the 20 Lok Sabha seats in the State. Though the Mavelikara count was incomplete, the Candidate knew the outcome. Yes, he did experience a twinge of disappointment. Those who worked for him were even more dejected. His driver wept. In the final tally he secured 181,617 votes to 238,169 for his Congress rival and 24,450 for the SRP.

I returned home to Tiruvalla for a bath and some rest. I had learnt some electoral lessons. Expenditure increases with the amount available for

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distribution. Of the Rs 34,500 I had spent, half had gone to my seven Assembly running mates. Of course I had spent nothing on the organisation and volunteers gave of their time and transport freely. A day later I drove around the constituency, visiting all seven Assembly segments to express my thanks to the local workers and supporters. Thereafter, I returned to Aleppey to file my election expenses. The official at the Collectorate was surprised and, I suspect, faintly amused. Such alacrity and, indeed, respect for the rules was unusual. I concluded that electoral purity is undermined by the indifference shown to regulations after the event. This too breeds impunity.

The campaign was over, the results in, the election done.

> The Candidate bid goodbye to the Returning Officer and walked out of the Collectorate to greet another day. And what a day! March 21 felt like August 15, 1947. The Emergency had been lifted and a Janata government would soon be called to office. The cause had triumphed overwhelmingly. The Candidate had not been elected. But he knew that he had won.

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9

A NEW DAWN

Mrs Gandhi's defeat in 1977 was a remarkable expression of the power of the people's will, and an indictment of the excesses and illegalities of the Emergency. The silent majority spoke eloquently. The Congress was literally wiped out from most north Indian states, not winning even a single seat in Bihar, UP, Haryana, Himachal, Punjab and Delhi, only one each in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and three in West Bengal, its stalwarts scattered like ninepins. Yet the Congress Party had 153 seats in the Lok Sabha as against the 294 held by the Janata Party, and commanded a majority in the Upper House. The turnout had exceeded 60 per cent and 194 million electors voted. The Janata-CPM alliance got no seat in Kerala, only one in Andhra, two in Karnataka and three in Tamil Nadu. Censorship won the south for the Congress. The regional polarisation was stark.

If India had won Independence in 1947, it won freedom in 1977. The two are not synonymous, a distinction brought home by the trials of the Emergency. Henceforth, freedom of expression was no more seen merely as freedom of the press, but as that of the individual citizen too.

A fortnight after the declaration of the Emergency, I had received a call informing me that I had been selected for the 1975 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and the Creative Communication Arts. It was an uplifting moment and messages of affection and goodwill poured in from many sides. Jamila accompanied me to Manila for the solemnly choreographed presentation ceremony, which took place on 31 August. The citation said:

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> Verghese is recognised for superior developmental reporting of Indian society, balancing factual accounts of achievements, shortcomings and carefully researched alternatives. Verghese has practised journalism within exacting professional criteria with a perspicacity matched by few of his colleagues anywhere. In March 1974 his *Will to New Purpose: Gandhi's Truth Recalled* presciently anticipated his nation's new quandary.

My fellow awardees were a Malaysian judge, a Thai monk dedicated to treating drug addiction, a South Korean feminist and an Irish social worker in that country. The awards had been instituted in 1958 to commemorate the great reformist Filipino president, Ramon Magsaysay. Ten Indians had thus far received them.

I had been officially advised, before going to Manila, that I should refrain from saying anything about the Emergency. I had replied that to my mind the award presentation ceremony was not the occasion for polemics. My response to the citation therefore contained only a very indirect reference to the situation at home:

> Few achievements are individual. People and institutions are shaped by the environment in which they live and work. It is therefore the tradition of constructive inquiry nurtured by the Indian Press and its growing readership over a century and more which I acknowledge and uphold in accepting this Award ...
>
> The Press, especially in a developing society, is more than a mirror. It stands somewhere between university and government. It has a duty to its readers whose confidence it has to win and whose interests it must maintain and seek to enlarge day after day. But its true constituency is society, the community as a whole—the illiterate, who cannot read newspapers; the impoverished who cannot buy them; and the underprivileged, whose problems and aspirations need to be articulated ...
>
> India ... is rediscovering the message and wisdom of Gandhi, a man far ahead of his time. The Mahatma was concerned with the quality of life, starting with what he called 'the last man'. He believed in building from below. His goal was 'to wipe the tear from every eye'. He preferred consensus to competition, emphasised right means and placed society above the state.
>
> At a moment in history when even the most affluent nations are in search of an alternative society, the countries of the Third

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> World too need to think of their future . . . And in this task too, the Press has its part to play.

Back home, the Magsaysay Award was a possible reason why I was not arrested. The prize money saw me through the rest of the Emergency, for part of which I was unemployed, and helped me pay the instalments for the roof currently over my head.

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After my ouster from *The Hindustan Times* in September 1975, I cast around wondering what I should do. I became a member of the People's Union for Civil Liberties and, subsequently, Citizens for Democracy, both inspired by JP. I was sounded out informally as to whether I would care to join the editorial staff of *Ceres*, FAO's journal published from Rome. This was attractive but I much preferred to live and work in India. Just then, Vadilal Dagli, a friend and the editor of *Commerce*, an economic weekly published from Bombay, invited me to join the journal as 'editorial adviser' in Delhi. I was glad to do so as this offered a perch and an outlet for some writing. Moreover, the journal was supported by the industrial magnate, Arvind Mafatlal, whom I knew and for whom I had high regard.

I was with *Commerce* from February until December 1976. The journal played safe and not all that I wrote was published. Much of what appeared was on social issues and what was being done by NGOs through voluntary action. The retirement of the first Scheduled Caste member of the IAS (Chaudury Kartar Singh, 1948-76) provided an occasion to write about social movement 'slowly up the ladder'.

The number of SC/ST college students in the country had gone up from 731 in 1949 to over 400,000 in 1975. Progress in technical education was not as much, with ST enrolment noticeably lagging. The 22 per cent reserved quota for SC/ST candidates in the All-India services was first attained for both categories in 1964. The quota continued to be filled regularly thereafter, with lags in ST intake being made good by qualifying SC candidates, the two categories being interchangeable at that time. In 1975, some 20 per cent of district collectors and superintendents of police were drawn from among the Scheduled Castes. A broadly similar pattern was discernible in the provincial services. According to official sources, there were 35,061 SC Class I officers in the central, state and local governments; 54,129 in the Class II category; and 1,240,000 and 1,630,000 in the Class III and IV categories, respectively.

The position in the public sector had also improved (especially after

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the nationalisation of banks and other sectors), though not correspondingly in the private sector.

Among SCs, Chamars constituted 70 to 75 per cent, Balmikis 10 per cent, Mahars 6 per cent, and others, the remaining 10 to 15 per cent. The distribution of the reservation benefits had, more or less, followed that pecking order, based on social status. These rising numbers began to attract the attention of a young government employee, Kanshi Ram, who sought to organise this newly-emerging elite among the SC/ST community along with OBCs, Muslims, Christians (who, he argued, were mostly Dalit converts) and other minorities into an All-India Backward and Minority Community Employees' Federation (BAMCEF), as a natural coalition of the underprivileged. This was a brilliant piece of political engineering and laid the foundation of what is today's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). I had met Kanshi Ram in those early years at his office in West Delhi and at seminars and other fora, and was struck by the perseverance with which he was patiently building this constituency, brick by brick, looking far ahead. The BSP is, today, a force in parts of north India and has given India its first woman Dalit chief minister, Mayawati, in UP.

Social change was contemplated in other areas as well. In 1976, the Child Marriage Act (also known as the Sharda Act) was amended to raise the age of marriage from fifteen to eighteen for girls, and eighteen to twenty-one for men. It was part of a population reduction strategy based on later marriages and responsible parenthood. If marriages were delayed, there had to be something for young people (especially young women in the countryside) to do. The answer seemed to lie in promoting education with imaginative programmes to train young men and women to spread adult literacy, simple healthcare, sanitation and nutritious diets. (Another benefit was that such schemes would also provide them with a modest income.)

There were several developments that helped in the implementation of such schemes. Exciting possibilities were opened up by the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) conducted through 1975-76, with the aid of an American Advanced Technology Satellite over the Indian Ocean. SITE was jointly implemented by the Space Applications Centre (SAC), which improvised critical hardware, and AIR, and pioneered the first sustained direct-to-home broadcasts anywhere in the world, covering 2400 villages in six linguistic clusters of 400 villages each, located in varied agro-climatic and cultural zones like Gulbarga, Hyderabad, Raipur, Sambalpur, Muzaffarpur, Kheda (Nanded), Jaipur and Delhi. The objective was to test the feasibility of promoting national

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integration and developmental communication through satellite television. The experiment was an outstanding success and learning experience and, subsequently, the Planning Commission approved the expansion of the new Doordarshan network for furthering rural development.

The establishment of the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), Hyderabad, and SAC, Ahmedabad, under the aegis of the newly-formed Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in Bangalore, gave the country's planners a third eye, and a more accurate assessment of the country's natural resources could be made. A national land and natural resource inventory was one of the first projects to be initiated, using both satellite and fixed-wing assets. The results were startling. Coconut wilt was mapped in Kerala and citrus and sandalwood diseases in Karnataka. A significant under-reporting of the area under paddy was noticed in Andhra where, again, so-called reserved forests were shown to be lacking cover, thus belying established 'ground truths'. In many such crucial areas, space technology soon became a part of life and planning.

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Back from an assignment in the Seychelles, I travelled widely with Arvind Mafatlal, looking at his corporate social responsibility rural development projects, which were being pursued in association with the Bharatiya Agro-Industrial Foundation (BAIF) and Ranchoddasji Maharaj's Sadguru Seva Sangh. Arvindbhai was a Gandhian who brought his group's management and technological inputs to bear on the planning and execution of rural upliftment programmes, largely in the fields of cattle breeding, afforestation and tribal development. In 1970, he had undertaken a 'scarcity relief' feeding programme in Gujarat and then in Vidarbha, and distributed protein rich sukhadi, at food-for-work centres. Sukhadi, which was made up of atta, vanaspati, gur and mineral and vitamin additives, proved so popular that it encouraged the Maharashtra government to invite Mafatlal and the Sadguru Seva Sangh to undertake a similar feeding programme during the Marathwada famine of 1971-72. It was a massive endeavour with an elaborate assembly of ingredients at the two central kitchens in Bombay and Ahmednagar, and the transportation of the sukhadi by truck and bullock carts over a hundred or more kilometres daily, for delivery to 3.5 million beneficiaries at remote work sites. The overall unit cost worked out to fifty paise per 'stick'. It was a great job well done.

Mafatlal's preoccupation with drought relief made him witness to the repeated sufferings of whole communities and their livestock and land

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degradation from the folly of trying to grow grain in semi-arid regions better suited to mixed farming. The cow became, for Arvindbhai, what the charkha was to Gandhiji—an instrument for improving people's lives and lifting them above the poverty line. Why not convert scrub cattle into productive milch cows and strong draught animals through crossbreeding with high-yielding stock like Jerseys and Holsteins which yielded many times the milk produced by ill-fed, ill-bred desi varieties? He believed that the goal must be to develop a national milk herd of superior, high-yielding crossbreds through artificial insemination, scientific feeding and matching health measures. Where was he to find the men and the technology for implementing such a scheme?

Mafatlal found the answer in Manibhai Desai, an acolyte of Gandhi at Urli Kanchan, an unprepossessing village in a barren rain-shadow area, twenty kilometres from Poona. The story goes back to 29 March 1946. Gandhi had gone there to look for a possible site for a nature-cure ashram, which he hoped would become a total village development centre. Enter Sudhir Ghosh, post-haste from Delhi, bearing letters from Pethwick Lawrence and Stafford Cripps summoning Gandhi back to Delhi for urgent consultations, before the Cabinet Mission commenced its fateful labours.

The Mahatma's aides urged him to take the special train that had been readied for him. Gandhi dismissed the suggestion, remarking that his work at Urli was no less important than negotiating independence. At his prayer meeting that evening, he said, '*Urli nahin banega, to Delhi nehi sambhalega.*' The implication was that a transformation of Village India alone would provide a sure foundation for national stability and progress. When Gandhi entrained for Delhi the next morning, he left behind a young Manibhai Desai to carry forward his mission.

Orthodox Gandhians shunned 'capitalist farming' but Manibhai, self-taught, laboured on to master cross-breeding, artificial insemination and animal health, with Danish assistance. From those early beginnings, Manibhai and Mafatlal teamed up to build the Bharatiya Agro-Industries Foundation (BAIF), which was established in 1967.

There was no looking back. To grow fodder and enable the Urli Kanchan farm to earn its keep, Manibhai introduced lift irrigation and new cropping patterns including fodder and fruit, with land-shaping and terracing and water conservation through mulching, much of this through cooperative enterprise. BAIF launched a decentralised programme for 'adopting' local cows for cross-breeding, if a viable number of farmers came together for such a service.

The results were gratifying. With Mafatlal's organisational acumen

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and financial muscle, new horizons opened up for rural regeneration. From Maharashtra the programme and offshoots spread to Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and elsewhere and into tribal upliftment, afforestation, desert reclamation and water resource development. Mafatlal directed each of his many industrial plants to 'adopt' one or other programme, provide senior management, financial, material, technical and logistical support, with the company bearing the cost. He monitored these operations personally. This was a fine flowering of Gandhiji's concept of trusteeship, which is embodied in more recent concepts of corporate social responsibility.

I went around the Urli Kanchan 'cross-breeding catchment', the tribal block of Bansda in Bulsar district, and Chitrakoot, on the Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh border, with Manibhai and Arvindbhai. BAIF's goal was now to launch a 'Million Cow Project' by establishing 500 centres, spread over 4 states, with a minimum of 2000 cows in each.

Among the most interesting visits I undertook with Arvindbhai was a sojourn to Kutch. One of the more rewarding features of the visit was a shower in a former princely mahal in Bhuj. The marble bathroom was huge and the shower had an elaborate and still-working battery of sprays and nozzles labelled mountain mist, gentle rain, thundershower, gale and cyclone, each producing the intended effect! I must confess to wasting a lot of water, testing every aspect of this novelty. Thus royally refreshed, we ventured into the desert.

It was a longish drive to Dhordo, through the green aquifer-watered girdle of Kutch, past ochre mud-flats, a tongue of the Little Rann, and then on to Banni, a sandy-scrub waste spread over 850 square kilometres just south of the Great Rann. It was then home to 12,000 nomadic cattle breeders, all Muslim, who lived in 46 hamlets. Till then, they had been unable to find sufficient forage for their 20,000 Kutchhi buffaloes and splendidly-horned Kankrej cattle, and would annually migrate as far south as Surat in search of pasture.

Dhordo came into sight, with two acres of tall ku babul and hedge Lucerne and an adjacent field of giant Napier grass, all in different shades of brilliant green. It had all been planted by BAIF only a year back. The sight was no mirage. This was where we found Gul Beg, the acknowledged chief of the Banni people. Dhordo was like any other hamlet in the area with its round, cone-topped mud huts or *bhungas*. The women wore exquisitely embroidered bodices and the rugs and ornamentation in Gul Beg's home were objects of envy. The more arid and dull the area, the more colourful the dress and crafts of the people!

I had earlier often visited Anand to learn more about Operation

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Flood, a unique rural programme designed to provide India with better nutrition, and generate income and employment through buffalo dairying and milk products. This had been brilliantly executed by Verghese Kurien through AMUL (the Anand Milk Union Limited), the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation and the National Dairy Development Board.

In India, buffaloes yield more milk and fat than desi cows. But they could not match the potential of scientifically-selected, cross-bred cattle. In the mid-1970s, India had 180 million cows and 60 million buffaloes with the annual average milk yield per milch animal estimated at 157 and 504 litres, respectively. The buffalo had the early lead but the potential of the cow was far greater. Both needed to be developed.

India needed to produce sixty-four million tonnes of milk by the end of the twentieth century, for which thirty million improved cows and eighteen million improved she-buffaloes were required by 2000. The huge remaining population of low-producing and scrub animals had, ideally, to be culled. Cow slaughter, however, had been politically rejected, time and again, and it had seldom been possible to impart rationality to the debate in the face of strong traditional sentiment. In cattle breeding areas, however, the importance of selection and culling was coming to be recognised even by some of the faithful. But the contradiction inherent in Article 48 of the Constitution, between organising animal husbandry and improving breeds and 'prohibiting slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle', remained unresolved. The country continues to be burdened with millions of unproductive scrub animals.

If Anand worked backwards from the urban consumer or nutrition factor (the demand side) to the rural producer, employment and income generation, BAIF started from the supply side, focusing on enhancing milk production. But the objectives were essentially similar and aimed at fulfilling larger national objectives.

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Towards the end of 1976, I participated in some civil liberty meetings alongside others who were strongly critical of the Emergency. Being informed that this had embarrassed *Commerce* and the Mafatlal Group, I immediately tendered my resignation from the journal, though my relations with Dagli and affection and respect for Arvindbhai remained undiminished. I later happened to meet one of the younger Mafatlal brothers. He was most apologetic about the turn of events, which had evidently been precipitated by pressures from certain quarters.

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Radhakrishnan of the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) in Delhi, who was closely associated with JP's movement, suggested I might pursue my interest in rural development through the GPF. I was interested but felt I should wait awhile. The elections were soon announced and events took another turn.

Meanwhile, an invitation to lecture on rural development at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, gave me an opportunity to set out my thoughts on this topic. I felt design was both an instrument and an outcome and hence must be treated as a means of growth and betterment and not merely the end result of development and change. Development had to be about people and rural development, surely, must go beyond agriculture. Hence the importance of social infrastructure such as education, health and housing.

Even in the realm of agriculture in India, labour intensity was low. For every 100 hectares sown, India in 1975 employed no more than 93 persons as against 181 in Egypt and 219 in Japan. Agriculture too must mean more than grain. It should involve moving from calories (grain) to protein (pulses), fruits, vegetables, fish, sugar, poultry products, and to overcoming hunger with mixed farming and agrarian reform.

The unplanned growth of cities suggested the need to make villages habitable and productive, with more off-farm development through agro-industries and services; and improved technologies to help artisans and craftsmen upgrade to meet modern market requirements. Thus potters could be trained to make hardware for water management and sanitation, backed by appropriate R&D. While economies of scale in industry must be exploited, industry too could be scaled down to cater to emerging rural markets by utilising decentralised energy based on bio-mass, solar, and other renewable sources. Our basic education should make us functionally literate and there must be an awareness that medicine begins where health ends, with top priority being given to preventive and social health. All this entailed what I called a new design for living in which an institution like the NID had a role to play.

*

On the political front, there were unexpected developments. The general elections over, I received a telegram in Kerala from L.K. Advani inviting me to participate in a collective oath-taking and dedication to unity, freedom and service by all Janata MPs, at Rajghat. I could not make it and, probably, would not have gone anyway as I had no desire to muscle in. (*The Daily Pratap*, Delhi, was soon after good enough to suggest that I be appointed mayor of Delhi. This tickled me, as it would

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have been fun to strut around in ermine and be addressed as His Worship, or whatever it is that mayors are called.)

The immediate task before the Janata Party was to elect a leader. Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram and Charan Singh threw their hats into the ring. Scenting little support, Charan Singh withdrew. Some favoured Jagjivan Ram as a Scheduled Caste leader; others were chary as he had moved the Emergency resolution in the Lok Sabha, though he had finally broken with Mrs Gandhi just before the poll. Old Congressmen backed Morarji. It was finally decided to leave the matter to JP and Acharya Kripalani in order to avoid any unseemly wrangling. Morarji was selected when Charan Singh tilted in his favour. Jagjivan Babu was piqued and sulked for a while but, ultimately, joined the government. The Janata government was sworn in on 24 March 1977.

With the Janata in office, Morarji told me I 'deserved' something and what would I like to do? I sought nothing. But I felt that the story of the Emergency needed to be written and I would like to be given the opportunity to do so, with full access to official records. The Pentagon Papers had helped America regain its soul and I felt a similar exercise in India would be wholesome. Morarji said that it had already been, more or less, decided to set up a commission of inquiry into the Emergency and that my proposal would therefore not be feasible. He tentatively inquired if I would like to return as his information adviser, a proposition that did not appeal to me.

He did not forget that he needed to do 'something' for me and, in March 1978, asked if I would be agreeable to being nominated to the Rajya Sabha. I was surprised and wrote him a note expressing my deep appreciation, but stating that I was 'personally a little troubled as to whether I should accept a nomination after being so recently rejected by the electorate'. I, however, agreed to be guided by his advice. Word leaked and some newspapers announced that I was being nominated. I received congratulatory letters, cables and phone calls from far and near, and it was good to hear from old friends and strangers. The fact is that my name was proposed by the prime minister but was shot down by Charan Singh. Malcolm Adiseshiah, the well-known economist, was nominated instead.

*

About this time, I accepted an assignment from the Ford Foundation to write a paper on non-governmental or civil society action, a new area it wished to explore for possible funding. The result was a little monograph entitled 'Voluntary Action: A New Mission for New Missionaries'.

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Voluntary work in India, as elsewhere, had its origins in charity. Hence its close links with social reform and missionary activity aimed at spreading enlightenment and education; alleviating suffering; providing medical care; and concern for the physically and socially handicapped.

Then emphasis shifted from individual to community concerns with welfare and moral responsibility as the drivers. Flood and drought turned attention to organised relief. This attracted international aid and donor funding, which was disbursed to approved voluntary agencies, as in Bihar in 1967. The repetitiveness of relief, with drought following drought, soon brought a realisation of its futility if not wastefulness, and people's thoughts turned to development in a bid to find permanent answers. This was to open a new phase of voluntary action in India.

Social work always had its corps of professionals, mostly educators and medical personnel. Now a whole new range of expertise was in demand—geologists, hydrologists, agronomists, engineers, surveyors, sociologists, veterinarians, communicators and animators of every kind. Talented professionals and angry young social revolutionaries joined the movement becoming dynamos of militant voluntarism and social action. Idealistic men and women joined young, but opted out for secure jobs once their family responsibilities grew, being replaced in turn by mid-career retirees who had made their pile, and now wanted to move from routine office life to innovative field work. They brought experience.

Voluntary organisations often had to operate under official guidelines, or in tandem with government programmes or donor priorities, so they underwent gradual modification. Fortunately, India, unlike some of its neighbours, did not suffer from being donor-led. The great advantage of voluntary agencies was their ability to experiment, get off the beaten track and take risks. Wherever they met with success, governments were glad to tread the same paths. NGOs had, therefore, served as pioneers and trail-blazers.

The growth in size of some NGOs had, however, led to bureaucratisation. In several cases, excellent organisations had been built around the vision and dynamism of a single person, and had tended to fade with his or her departure. The logical successor to a successful voluntary agency, I believed, should be the community, made self-reliant in the process.

Much of the annual investment in voluntary action in India in the 1970s came from abroad—a sad commentary on Indian philanthropy, which is still oriented towards charity and piety. The entry of industrial houses into the field of rural development, however, had opened up

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possible areas of partnership and the funding of social entrepreneurs, or the outsourcing of corporate social responsibility.

Most active voluntary agencies, I discovered, were either Gandhian or church-related. They were, by and large, concentrated in southern and western India, though other groups had started functioning in the north-central belt and eastern region. There had also been a tendency to radiate outwards from socially conscious urban centres like Hyderabad, Poona and Bangalore. The Gandhian movement, however, was beginning to show signs of ageing.

There has since been a new growth of civil society activism which has also taken on interesting forms, with the internet providing new opportunities for networking and collaboration, especially in the areas of advocacy, human rights, legal support and mobilisation.

*

Towards the end of 1977, UNESCO decided to set up, under Sean MacBride, Nobel Laureate and former Irish foreign minister, an international commission for the study of communication problems. I was invited to be a member, along with a number of very distinguished colleagues including Beuve-Mery, editor of *Le Monde*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, soon to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Sergei Losev of the Soviet Union, Johannes Pronk of the Netherlands, Juan Somavia of Chile, Mochtar Lubis from Indonesia, Elie Abel of *The New York Times*, who had served in India and others from Japan, Egypt, Tunisia, Nigeria, Zaire and Canada.

The commission was to look at information flows, see how far these were dominated by the North, and secure more balanced communications. The developing countries of the Third World, recently decolonised, continued to feel dominated by information and cultural flows from the industrially developed nations of the world, while their voices could not be heard. The major news and photo agencies, television and radio networks and repositories of advanced communications technology were located in the North, which demanded a free flow of information. The developing nations, being information-poor, argued that such flows simply could not be a one-way affair, but must be balanced.

Early ideological and Cold War confrontation within the commission soon yielded to greater understanding and accommodation under MacBride's wise and patient stewardship. Ultimately, we presented a virtually unanimous report that stressed training, technological access, joint collaboration and assistance by the North to build up the

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communications infrastructure and skills in the South to ensure these voices a wider hearing. The report, 'Many Voices, One World', was presented to the director general of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, in February 1980. It occasioned great debate as information and propaganda were at the heart of Cold War politics.

I was nominated to a number of institutions at home and became chairman of the National Institute of Design and was appointed to the boards of the State Bank of India, HUDCO, the Indian Institute of Mass Communications, the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, the National Labour Institute, and the National Institute for Rural Development. These gave me rare insights and I was surprised to discover that at State Bank meetings we would be routinely greeted by the minutes of the meeting we had come to attend and would be sent off with handsome gifts! Needless to say, I protested.

*

Most stimulating among the assignments that came my way was chairing the Working Group on broadcast autonomy for AIR and Doordarshan. Nehru had told the Constituent Assembly in 1948 that he would like AIR, in due course, to become an autonomous corporation rather on the lines of the BBC. The Chanda Commission had recommended autonomy for broadcasting in 1965, an idea fiercely resisted for the government argued that it must be armed with its own trumpet, as the newspapers were privately owned! Mrs Gandhi was, during the Emergency, to exclaim, 'What autonomy? We are the government!'

Censorship had taught the Opposition a salutary lesson. The Janata Party was committed to broadcast autonomy and a working group was set up to recommend how best this might be accomplished. The membership was impressive: Vasant Rajadhyaksha, member, Planning Commission; Praxy Fernandes, finance secretary; Dr Malcolm Adiseshiah; Umashankar Joshi, the well-known Gujarati author, Chanchal Sarkar; A.G. Noorani; Professor J.D. Sethi; P.L. Deshpande; C.R. Subramanian, the CMD, Bharat Electronics Ltd; Nayantara Sehgal and Dr Ishwar Dass.*

After many hearings and visits we had recommended the establishment of a National Broadcast Trust named Akash Bharati, responsible for the conduct of public broadcasting. This was to be 'a citizen of India', a non-

*The printed report of the working group titled 'Akash Bharati, a National Broadcasting Trust', was presented to the minister for information and broadcasting, L.K. Advani, in February 1978, together with a Hindi translation and a draft Bill.

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profit body and an essential service, its charter and organisational structure were laid out. The board was to consist of between twelve and twenty-one members with a chairman and three full-time trustees for news and current affairs, education and extension, and entertainment and culture, respectively. A full-time controller general of broadcasting or CEO would be secretary of the board and be assisted by a Central Executive Board of functionaries in descending tiers to state, regional and lower levels, each appropriately autonomous in its own jurisdiction. Funding was to come from licence fees, commercial revenues, sales and services and consultancy, supplemented by budgetary resources voted by Parliament. The government was vested with certain reserve powers to compel or withhold any matter for broadcast, with reasons given in writing, and there was to be an independent Complaints Board to adjudicate on unfair treatment, unwarranted invasion of privacy and misrepresentation. Also contemplated was a Licensing Board to franchise universities and other educational and cultural institutions in the first instance to operate low power radio and television stations.

The report was generally well received, especially by the broadcasting community, which was enthusiastic and found both liberation and scope for creativity in what had been proposed. Advani, as information and broadcasting minister, wryly exclaimed, 'We promised autonomy. But you have recommended independence.' This did not sound like good news. It was not. The government later introduced a modified Prasar Bharati Bill that never got through the Upper House, where it lacked a majority. A great opportunity was allowed to pass.

*

I joined the Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) in mid-1977, and was straightaway inducted into the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, or AVARD, that JP had founded. The GPF had been a gathering place for JP and those associated with him and the Bihar struggle. Now Janata stalwarts, old Gandhians and khadi workers and more recent intellectual and professional recruits to the liberal-Gandhian cause found this a convenient rendezvous.

The GPF's committee rooms, friendly canteen and hall became popular venues for lively discourse and well-attended public meetings. JP himself stayed with JJ and Malti Singh or with Ramnath Goenka, but his 'office' was at the GPF. It was an address that mattered. The formation and fortunes of the Janata government at various points were negotiated and debated there.

AVARD's monthly journal, *Voluntary Action*, had been shut down

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during the Emergency. I took over its editorship and revived it and it soon became a lively platform of discourse, information, evaluation and alternative ideas on grassroots planning, rural development, appropriate technology, the marginal man, social entrepreneurship, women's lib, the environmental movement, and a commentary on much else that brought in material and contributions from a wide range of people and disciplines.

We mapped and brought to the public gaze many wonderful new voluntary initiatives and organisations. There was Prem Bhai's Banwasi Seva Ashram in the depths of Mirzapur; Bunker Roy's Social Work Research Centre at Tilonia in Rajasthan, The Gandhigram Trust and Working Women's Forum in Tamil Nadu; the Nimbkar Agricultural Institute at Phaltan; and Father Windey's Village Reconstruction Organisation in Guntur.

We wrote of mobile creches designed for construction workers and launched by Mira Mahadevan; the Chipko andolan under Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna; the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme run by Anil Sadgopal and the Kishore Bharati Group; the preservation of Silent Valley, a 9000-hectare rainforest in Palghat where a hydro-project had been proposed.

We went on to highlight the revolutionary Bhangi Mukti programme of the Sulabh Shauchalaya Sansthan under Bindeshwar Pathak, which was to achieve national acclaim and world fame; the then director of IIM-Ahmedabad, Ravi Mathai's rural university experiment at Jawaja in Rajasthan, combining enhanced craft skills with learning; Baba Amte's dedicated work among the leprosy-afflicted in Chandrapur, Maharashtra; Ninasam, the remarkable popular theatre and film centre at Heggodu in Karnataka's Shimoga district, pioneered by K.V. Subanna; the death at 101, of grand old Welthy Fisher, an American missionary who had established the Literacy Mission in Lucknow to fight ignorance under the banner of her famous internationally-known slogan: 'It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness'; and Dr P.K. Sethi's Jaipur Foot, which transformed prosthetics in the Third World.

There were many more stories that we told of struggles and achievements in the boondocks. These were transforming lives and notions of education and development and needed to be better known and replicated wherever possible.

We also wrote about two remarkable trade union movements. One was the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) inspired by Ela Bhatt. SEWA, a unique body of unorganised and roofless street labour, was registered as a trade union in 1972 and, starting in Ahmedabad, spread far. Our other feature related to Shankar Guha Niyogi of the

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Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, who fought for the dignity and rights of exploited tribal coal workers, thereby provoking powerful vested interests. Subsequently, Niyogi was tragically murdered.

Ela Bhatt had, likewise, to face the ire of the Majoor Mahajan, the Textile Labour Association (TLA), born in 1918 after Gandhiji's intervention in a strike in one of Ambalal Sarabhai's mills. This had given birth to modern trade unionism in India.

Sixty years later, the anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat spilled on to Ahmedabad's streets in January 1981. Since a third of SEWA's members were Harijans (later called Dalits), they bore the brunt of the persecution, harassment, violence and loss of livelihood from market closures, disruption of trade and credit flows and the dislocation of civic life.

Responding to a sudden call, workers in the cotton spinning departments across Ahmedabad's textile mills (where the labour was mostly Harijan), went on a lightning strike in protest against the indignities being heaped on the community. This meant the closure of all other departments, paralysing Ahmedabad's entire textile industry. The Majoor Mahajan was by-passed and an industry that had not known a strike for decades was suddenly shut down.

Ela Bhatt, concerned about protecting the interests of SEWA's Harijan members, organised a prayer meeting and appealed for peace. She also inveighed against the agitation by junior doctors, who were leading the anti-reservation movement, and spoke in support of the new reservation policy. This was resented by the *savarna* (caste Hindu) agitators and by the Majoor Mahajan leadership which felt that production should not be hampered in any manner. They believed that no industrial issue was at stake and concluded that Ela Bhatt had been guilty of 'indiscipline', this despite Gandhiji's call to end untouchability and uphold Harijan rights. Ela Bhatt was expelled from the TLA, and SEWA was on its own. It weathered the storm but the Majoor Mahajan went into decline, partly because Ahmedabad's sunset cotton textile industry was yielding place to mixed fibres and workers were re-training for more congenial white-collar avocations in new chemical, pharma and other sunrise industries.

Voluntary Action wrote about some unusual ventures too. Romulus Whitaker, of the Madras Snake Park, started the Irula Snake Catchers' Cooperative. The Irulas are impoverished 'dispersed tribals' who live around Chinglepet in Tamil Nadu. Through the cooperative, they were helped to make a living selling snakes to the Haffkine Institute, Bombay, for venom extraction. At the time, the rates for live snakes were fifteen rupees for cobras and Russell's vipers, twenty-five rupees for kraits, and one rupee twenty-five paise for saw-scaled vipers. The requirement was for a little under a lakh of rupees worth of snakes per annum.

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Whitaker, whose other passion was crocodiles, stayed with us in Delhi and we learnt a good deal about wildlife from him. We took care not to upset him, as he had brought some pet snakes along with him as uninvited guests! He was good enough to invite me to join the board of the Irula Cooperative, which I bravely did as a stern call to duty, on the very reasonable condition that there should be a distance of 1000 kilometres between nervous board members and the snakes, at any given time. I had thought of printing a new set of visiting cards with my Irula title on it, which I could modestly display to impress and gently intimidate sundry contacts. I was, however, a bit slow off the mark and ruefully discovered I had been taken off the board before the order could be placed!

*

In mid-1978, Peking invited an Indian press delegation to China. I was requested to lead the team of five that included K.R. Malkani, former editor of *Motherland*. Mao and Chou En-Lai had passed away and Deng Xiaoping was in the final stages of his struggle to overthrow the notorious Gang of Four. We were briefed by our ambassador, K.R. Narayanan (later President of India).

At the commencement of the visit, we met Ulanfu, vice chairman of the National People's Congress and a member of the Politbureau. He extolled cultural and technological exchanges for better understanding as a prelude to tackling more knotty problems, such as the boundary issue. No problem would remain unsettled indefinitely, he promised, and the border question should not be allowed to become an obstacle to the improvement of relations in other fields, such as national and even border trade. If the minister was circumspect in his remarks, the official line was clearly spelt out in the party press. This suggested a long haul, and clearly indicated that for China the issue was on the back-burner. We have barely inched forward in the thirty years since then!

We did the usual sights, old and new. The cities were drab and wore the ravages of years of civil war. The countryside appeared extensively shaped and terraced. Agriculture was clearly far more labour intensive than in India, and I was struck by the homestead plots and integrated pig-cum-paddy-cum-duck-cum-fish farms. We were taken to Tachai, the prized national rural commune from which all were exhorted to learn. But within months of our visit it was discarded.

What I did find most impressive was the use of mass labour to construct what the Chinese termed 'farm capital assets', or rural

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infrastructure, to enhance land and water conservation and productivity, and to give a fillip to off-farm development. Backyard pig iron plants had been retired, and the new industries were the progenitors of the small- and-medium enterprises that helped build entrepreneurship and spread industrialisation.

I wrote about the China visit on my return home and canvassed the converting-labour-into-capital model through an imaginative national service-cum-land army scheme partly financed through food-for-work. There were few takers.

*

Towards the end of 1979, the shadow of elections loomed large as the Janata Party disintegrated. It was a time when several issues affecting women also came to the forefront. *Voluntary Action* carried a report and commentary on a joint appeal by ten women's organisations to the women of India to press for the acceptance and implementation of a Women's Charter. It was addressed to peasant and agricultural workers, working women, housewives and young girls. The demands included the creation of employment opportunities, enforcement of the Equal Remuneration Act, crèches and day centres in work places, a substantial increase in women's representation 'from panchayats to Parliament', expanded family welfare services to reduce maternal and infant mortality, and drastic measures against those committing atrocities against Dalit and Adivasi women.

The signatories included the All-India Women's Conference, the National Federation of Indian Women, the Dalit Bharatiya Mahila Jagriti Parishad, Stree Sangharsh and six other bodies. The appeal pointed to the declining status of Indian women to the extent that their lives could be taken with impunity through 'dowry burnings' and other means. Not many months later, the Joint Action Committee against Rape and Sexual Harassment expressed outrage over a Supreme Court judgment in the famous case of Tukaram vs the State of Maharashtra concerning the custodial rape of a minor girl, Mathura, while being interrogated at a police station. Her submission was considered sufficient grounds to disprove rape even though Section 375 of the IPC states that a minor's consent cannot invalidate a charge of rape. Any terrified woman might 'submit'. A change in the law of rape was, therefore, demanded with the burden of proof of innocence being placed on the man. The appeal marked a new stage in the movement for gender justice and gave a new impetus to women's studies in India.

Another shameful blot on Indian society was the incidence of bonded

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labour. The Constitution had banished it in 1950, but Mrs Gandhi did so a second time around in 1976, under her Twenty-Point Programme for, in truth, bondage had continued. A survey conducted by the GPF in cooperation with the National Labour Institute estimated that there were 2.24 million bonded labourers in the 10 states that were investigated. Over 84 per cent were Dalits and Adivasis. Two-thirds were in bondage for debts of less than Rs 700 per annum, and many had incurred those debts for meeting their daily expenses and not for ceremonies and festivals, as commonly assumed. Most were young men below 40 or even 30. For quite a few, their wives were their meal ticket. Many had to pay an interest of 30 to 40 per cent and more on their loans, which could therefore never be redeemed, as they received less than the minimum wages. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan were the worst among the states surveyed.

The survey found that despite the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976, there had been no sustained effort to identify, release and rehabilitate these wretches. Bonded labour seemed to have a significant role in perpetuating property-and-income relationships in rural India. To that extent, bondage was more a political than merely an economic issue, a manifestation of raw feudal power, the struggle to eradicate which has intensified.

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In the field of education too, questions were being asked about the efficacy of what was being done. Among the Janata's promises had been a better deal for primary education and health. The Education Commission's report had, so far, been largely ignored although its member-secretary, J.P. Naik, a devoted Gandhian and secretary of the Indian Council for Social Science Research, was deeply-committed to educational reform.

UNESCO had come out with its report, 'Learning to Be', and Naik had been greatly influenced by Ivan Illich, the radical social philosopher, and his book *De-Schooling Society* that called for a functional approach to learning for Third World countries. Paolo Freire, the well-known Brazilian educationist and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, who was working with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, visited Delhi. He argued that adult education must enable people 'to read and write reality and not only words'. For him, the purpose of education was to 'enable people to begin to be human beings' and not mere 'shadows of beings' deprived of human rights and dignity. All this resonated with Gandhi's teachings and Naik took fresh inspiration from what he heard.

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Naik was for discarding exclusive dependence on formal systems of education in favour of non-formal neighbourhood schools, emphasised quality and vocational training and advocated de-linking jobs from university degrees. We discussed these ideas and wrote about them in *Voluntary Action*. Little came of this and some opposed the concept as condescending.

Similar discussions ensued on health, triggered by the report of a study group jointly set up by the ICSSR and the ICMR under the director general of the latter, Dr V. Ramalingaswami, and entitled 'Health for All: An Alternative Strategy'. The report enunciated a radical concept based on the country's health problems which, in turn, clearly related to social structures of inequality, poverty, hunger, unemployment, ignorance, insanitary surroundings and the poor status of women. Nutrition-deficiency, resulting in a steady erosion of the quality of our human resources, the lack of environmental sanitation, protected water supply, drainage and sewerage and exposure to communicable diseases were listed as prime concerns. From those premises it was concluded that the present model of Medicare had not worked except for a few at the top.

There were 6000 hospitals in the country with 450,000 beds while 196 medical colleges added 11,000 medical graduates annually to the existing stock of 250,000 doctors. But only a third of those were in the public sector and most were located in cities. Primary Health Centres were dysfunctional, had a limited outreach and were often by-passed. Urban hospitals offering specialist services generally served as expensive primary health centres for the surrounding population.

The report deplored the bureaucratisation and cultural alienation of the medical profession, which had led to 'over-specialisation and mystification'. It warned that the over-production of drugs and doctors could engender a vested interest 'in the continuance or expansion of ill-health'. The alternative proposed was a community-based model built bottom-up with emphasis on preventive healthcare and the promotion of good health. It also called for a new national drug policy to regulate the pattern of drug production to match the realities of national disease and income patterns. *Voluntary Action* brought out a special issue on Health Policy and Community Health that took the debate forward and evaluated a range of new field experiences.

I also prepared a Directory of Voluntary Action that AVARD published in 1979. This was a valuable compendium and was intended to create a sense of awareness of the nature and spread of voluntary action in the country. The listing immediately showed up large blanks on the map

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which needed to be filled. We hoped newer groups would be inspired to do so.

I must have travelled to almost every part of the country visiting voluntary agencies, rural development projects, Gandhian institutions and khadi centres. The effort was rewarding, the experience mixed. I found that the attitude of the Church had undergone a change over the years. Always dedicated to the poor and suffering, especially in remote, underserved or unserved areas, it had increasingly moved away from evangelism to striving to build a caring and just society. Paulo Freire was a powerful voice among those, Catholic and Protestant, who believed, like Gandhi, that to the hungry and outcast, God appears in a loaf of bread. So serving oppressed humanity through inclusive and just development and upholding human rights meant serving God without attempting to save souls. This new thinking was embodied in what came to be known as liberation theology and its variants.

Education and functional literacy were central to this endeavour. Officials connected with the implementation of the new land reform laws in West Bengal had found Harijan and Muslim sharecroppers unwilling to claim beneficiary rights under the act, from a superstitious belief that the landlord's land was God's land on which they had no right to trespass. Every individual had, therefore, to be helped to become a citizen, conscious of his rights, and organised to assert them, else zero added to zero would remain zero.

The World Council of Churches took a similar line in their policy statement, 'Towards a Church in Solidarity with the Poor'. The suffering of the poor was seen as a product of structural and institutional violence which often provoked them to react strongly against dominant groups. Development, therefore, had to be understood as a liberating process aimed at justice, self-reliance and growth.

The Gandhians espoused a similar ethic but there was an unwillingness on the part of some elements to move with the times. Much of what Gandhi said and taught had been reduced to an 'ism' or ideology, instead of remaining a dynamic philosophy of life confronting the challenges of modernisation, technology and new consciousness. Khadi was a good example. Born as a strategy of and movement for development, dignity, struggle and empowerment, it had tended to become a subsidised product produced through underpaid labour. From a means of political and economic change, it had become an end in itself.

The introduction of a bill in the Lok Sabha, in 1978, to permit the use of polyester fibre in the production of khadi cloth had disturbed some

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khadi workers and khadi politicians. They felt this would be sacrilege, departing from the concept of khadi as a handspun, hand-woven material made from natural fibre. Yet the suggestion to use polyester had come from some eminent khadi workers, who felt that a blend of cotton and polyester would make khadi more durable, wash well and enable spinners and weavers to earn better wages. Further, though polyester might be produced in large factories, the blended fibre would be spun and woven by hand, thus opening up new avenues of decentralised employment on a large scale. The battle lines were drawn between those out to defend a product and others anxious to promote a larger concept. The tardy development and induction of lok vastra or low-cost, low-energy, mini-textile-mill technology that had been successfully demonstrated, could only be attributed to the same inhibition.

The case for decentralised khadi production was strong. With the net national labour force then growing at seven to eight million per annum, the Fifth Plan estimated that seventy-five million new jobs would have to be created over the next decade to match the demand for employment. Considering that khadi and village industries employed larger numbers than the entire organised industry at that time, the logic of decentralised production was compelling.

A field tour of khadi bhavans and craft centres around Tamil Nadu was revealing. There, under a dynamic khadi leadership, the concept and image of khadi had undergone a transformation in cities, smaller towns and rural growth centres. I saw attractive products and displays of new and interesting designs and ready-made garments tailored from muslin khadi, khadi silk and traditional khadi-wear for men, women and children. The goods were marked, displayed on mannequins and packed in polythene covers. The sales staff were neatly attired and customer-friendly. The marketing aspect had not been neglected. No wonder the cash registers kept ringing.

Village industries too—for long the poor relative of khadi, despite registering larger aggregate production and sales—benefited from a similar makeover in production and display. Footwear was nicely displayed, and packed and even non-KVIC goods were available in certain outlets so that customers could make comparisons and take their choice. These outlets had become departmental stores. On display were sparkling honey, palm gur, unadulterated hand-pounded rice, pulses, spices, preserves, gingelly and groundnut oil, confectionery, cane and fibre work, mats, brushes, furniture, toys, incense sticks, well-packaged soaps made from non-edible oils like neem, ceramics and clay pottery, hand-made paper—all below 'market' prices. The Madras khadi bhavan

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even had salesmen on cycles peddling their products in several neighbourhoods, with some success.

The marketing drive had penetrated the countryside in the form of *engal pandaga salai* or 'apna bazaars', well stocked with KVIC and mill-manufactured daily essentials to provide one-stop rural shopping under the auspices of the Tamil Nadu Sarvodaya Sangh. The KVIC had, at that time, 14,000 retail outlets in the country which, together with 20,000 production sale points, made it, perhaps, the largest single chain store in the country. Imaginatively organised, it could have been a pioneering retail network and market leader.

I found the Haryana handloom and Gujarat KVIC centres thinking innovatively, though not quite as boldly as their Madras cousins. Elsewhere, the story was patchy and very traditional. Indian business is now discovering the rural market, which is where C.K. Prahalad, the management guru, has directed them for untapped sales and profit. The KVIC discovered and lost that opportunity thirty years ago and is yet to rediscover its potential.

On the issue of cattle development and cow slaughter, there was a huge gulf that separated pious sentiment from the ground realities—the cruel treatment meted out to cattle, the sale of the best milch cattle to slaughter houses by 'urban dairies' as soon as they ran dry, and the clandestine export of cattle-on-hoof to Pakistan and Bangladesh. The question had come alive again with Vinoba Bhave threatening to go on fast (April 1979) unless Kerala and West Bengal enacted legislation to ban cow slaughter. The Acharya had 'exempted' several north-eastern states and Goa. The rest of the country had accepted a ban on the lines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1959, prohibiting the slaughter of cows or young stock while permitting the slaughter of female buffaloes, bulls and bullocks after they ceased to yield milk or proved incapable of breeding or working as draught animals. The problem lay in the overgrazing of rangelands and forests by unproductive animals, which compete for land and forage not only with good milch and draught animals but also with sheep, goats, horses, mules, donkeys, camels and elephants.

The case for humane methods of slaughter and sanitary abattoirs is, of course, well made. But the basic priority that human life and welfare must come first every time leaves little room for sentimentalism over cow protection. My Gandhian colleagues disagreed with my pleadings, but were most understanding of the need for rational debate conducted without malice.

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The other larger issue, in which the GPF and AVARD were involved, pertained to agrarian relations, centring on land reform. The entry point was the land struggle that had commenced around 1973-74 for the distribution of an estimated 9,000 acres of 'ceiling-surplus' lands held by the Bodh Gaya mahant and muth in 42 villages, in Bihar's Gaya district. The wide gap separating law from justice led volunteers of JP's Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini initially to enforce a labour boycott on muth lands and later to take possession of and cultivate 2,500 acres of the property. The question of who should reap the harvest led to confrontation, firing by the mahant's militia, fatalities and further litigation.

AVARD's Social Justice and Legal Aid Cell weighed in as did the Association of Sarva Seva Farms set up by Vinoba Bhave under S.Jagannathan to distribute bhoodan lands. The legal issues were complex. The muth's lands were originally vested in a zamindari trust from which it gained possession of 2,300 acres when zamindari was abolished. Also, some 9,300 acres had been vested in the mahant, most of this in the name of deities. To circumvent the legislation on land ceiling, these lands were further gifted, sold or settled in the name of his disciples.

This had been challenged by the official Bihar Religious Trust Board and had given rise to thriving litigation. Sustaining the struggle was a major problem for the Vahini, but justice was ultimately done with the muth lands being redistributed among those who had participated in the long struggle for land rights. The Bodh Gaya agitation helped untie one knot in Bihar's tangled and litigious land question.

My experience in Bihar over many years had convinced me that the key to its regeneration lay (and still lies) in attacking the root cause of its backwardness, namely, caste, iniquitous land relations (encompassing holdings, records of rights, access to credit, inputs, irrigation, indebtedness, minimum wages, bondage, and so on) and the feudal order cementing both. If confirmation were needed, this was forthcoming in ample measure in the scathing report, 'The Pivotal Role of Institutional Reform in Kosi Area Development', by P.S. Appu, the land reforms commissioner to the Government of India, but posted for a while as commissioner of the newly created Kosi Division and, subsequently, chief secretary, Bihar.

Appu noted the extreme concentration in land ownership, absentee landlordism, widespread sharecropping, the insecurity of tenure, the absence of accurate records of rights, rack-renting, the rise in landless agricultural labourers and pervading semi-feudal relations in the Kosi

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command. The legislation on ceilings had been evaded through fraudulent benami transactions, with the old landowners remaining the real and effective owners of vast areas, sometimes running into 1000 acres and more.

In Purnea district, 40 per cent of the land was under sharecroppers, mostly Dalit and Adivasi, the farms being characterised by fragmented, marginal holdings. The terms of sharecropping were highly unfavourable to the tiller who bore the entire cost of cultivation, yet had to give half the produce to the landowner. He remained a tenant-at-will as his holding was rotated every year so as to break the continuity in cultivation that would otherwise entitle him to fixity of tenure under the Bihar Tenancy Act. In Saharsa district, over 53 per cent of all agricultural workers were landless. With the landlord doubling as moneylender, usury and bondage were commonplace. Even the prescribed minimum wages were not paid and indebtedness was widespread. The story of groundwater usage, however, was more promising as cheap bamboo tubewells, which could be locally dug even by marginal farmers on small plots enabled sharecroppers to raise their productivity.

With the installation of Janata governments in Delhi and Patna, the omens seemed propitious for daring agrarian reform, in fulfilment of the Janata Party's own promises. JP was keen to build a pyramid of People's Committees from the village upwards. I argued that unless these bodies had a clearly defined role, animating a huge corps of busybodies would be disastrous. A better proposition would be to focus on a few blocks within the Kosi command, one of the worst agrarian districts in Bihar.

Citing military strategy, I urged a concentration of forces in a critical salient to overwhelm the enemy, establish a secure bridgehead, and then reinforce success to exploit the breakthrough. JP blessed the venture but was too unwell to participate. Karpoori Thakur, a former Socialist and the chief minister of Bihar at the time, was enthusiastic. And Appu, back as chief secretary, and some of his colleagues were on board. With the GPF and AVARD's backing, I proceeded to Patna for more detailed discussions.

It was decided, in consultation with the chief minister, chief secretary and key officials, to implement Kosi Kranti, a revolutionary agrarian reform programme, in the five blocks of Banmankhi, Barhara, Dhamdhoka, Bhawaniapur and Rupauli in the Sadr sub-division of Purnea district. A steering committee was formed comprising several influential people including highly-placed officials, Gandhians, academics and myself. A number of other institutions such as the Agricultural

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Finance Corporation, which had prepared micro-area development plans for the Kosi region, were also involved. This was indeed a most powerful group. In Delhi, the deputy chairman of the planning commission, Madhu Dandavate, and the Union agriculture secretary, G.V.K. Rao, promised support. We hoped to rope in some MPs and MLAs representing the Kosi area and, of course, sought the backing of the Bihar Cabinet. The vested interests were initially amused, then alarmed and, finally, outright hostile.

Making Kosi Kranti operational entailed the following steps:

The preparatory phase was to be devoted to checking the legal status of all landholdings and records, plugging loopholes, identifying possible institutional participants like local colleges, hospitals and NGOs, selecting and training administrative and popular cadres, preparing field manuals for recording occupancy and other rights, surveying ceiling surplus lands and preparing passbooks that would contain all relevant details and serve as a comprehensive legal document for all purposes including payment of revenue and irrigation dues, bank loans and even birth and marriage certification. Field operations could then hopefully commence after the kharif harvest in October, on the sixtieth anniversary of Gandhiji's Champaran movement, to complete the unfinished task of agrarian reform and deliver social justice to an exploited people.

A series of teams would then move into the target areas, each covering ten to fifteen villages. They would consist of revenue officials, popular cadres (including women), legal aid teams (lawyers and law students) and social educators who would interact with village committees (made up of a cross-section of farming and social categories) and issue passbooks on the basis of field verification and oral evidence.

Lands rendered surplus by the application of ceilings or as a result of consolidation could be allocated as homestead plots, community sites for bio-gas plants and processing sheds. The landless could also be given some of this land.

Absentee ownership would be barred and no landlord was to be permitted to retain any land unless residing in the village or in an adjacent village.

These processes were expected to take between thirty and forty-five days. A mobile land tribunal would be set up (by legislation if required) with as many circuit benches as necessary to follow the earlier teams and dispose of injunctions and suits, hearing evidence on the spot and taking recourse to summary procedures. Legal aid teams would assist the rural poor and all court fees, stamp duties, and so on would be made a charge on the state. All lands would be deemed to be vested in

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the name of passbook holders and no landlord would be allowed to hold lands in adverse possession. To preclude a proliferation of appeals, it was hoped to provide for no more than one appeal from land tribunals to the high court or Supreme Court and that too only on points of law and not of fact. The high court could be requested to set up special benches at district headquarters to hear and dispose of appeals within fifteen days. Thereafter, passbooks would be stamped with a special seal indicating the final transfer of all land titles.

The peasants were to be encouraged to form kisan sabhas federated upwards into chak sabhas (forty-acre irrigation blocks) and farmer's service societies (FSS) on a voluntary basis with usurious debts being cancelled or scaled down.

Necessary land and water development works (levelling, grading, drainage, the boring and recharging of tubewells) would then be undertaken and field channels constructed at the cost of the Kosi command area development authority, through local labour under the supervision of popular cadres.

The new peasant farmers and marginal landholders would be ensured inputs, credit, marketing facilities, implements and consumption loans in the form of grain. A tentative banking plan might also be formulated.

FSSs should procure tractors and attachments and make them available for hire.

The Agricultural University would suggest suitable multiple cropping patterns and the government would need to strengthen extension services on the training-and-visit pattern being introduced nationally.

We insisted that agricultural processing facilities must be developed together with regulated markets and storages.

It was also considered feasible to graft a health, nutrition and educational component to the package with the assistance of students and Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini cadres.

The whole range of activity would ideally translate into an area development programme with KVIC, bhoodan/gramdan organisations and others chipping in, all this underpinned by an employment guarantee scheme.

It was envisaged that the soil from desiltation of canals and jheels could be used to construct elevated approach roads, improve road access and fisheries, develop roadside plantations and provide some minimal flood-proofing.

We hoped it would be possible to get local AIR stations to run special programmes on and for Kosi Kranti, for which transistors could be distributed for community listening, and for the Song and Drama

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Division of the information and broadcasting ministry to plan a series of awareness-building programmes.

A village volunteer force, stiffened with ex-servicemen, was also contemplated to undertake protective patrolling to prevent lawlessness, intimidation or sabotage (say, the breaching of canals).

Social workers were to be trained to curb a possible surge in gambling and alcoholism with new income generation so that the beneficiaries of Kosi Kranti did not mortgage or lose their newly-won rights by incurring betting or liquor debts.

The Kosi Kranti was a doable programme, which gave flesh and blood to JP's call for Total Revolution. What happened? It was ultimately scuttled. And the failure to do anything to improve the conditions there has led to continuing caste wars, ruthless exploitation, mass migration and the rise of Naxalism.

I wrote a post-mortem in the June 1981 issue of *Voluntary Action*:

> Kosi Kranti started out in an atmosphere of hope. Off and on through 1978 and 1979 it seemed that something might come of it. Despite political infirmities and red tape, things did start moving. The horrendous incoherence of the Bihar administration was an obstacle that might have been surmounted with the guidance and dedication of some highly competent officers that continued to adorn the Bihar cadre. But there was no answer to political and social attitudes which ranged from total indifference to undisguised hostility at various levels, notwithstanding the exuberant sympathy of the then chief minister, Karpoori Thakur. One of the local MLAs threatened that, if pursued, Kosi Kranti would turn into 'khooni (bloody) kranti'. The sitting MP of the area too later confided that while the underlying objective was laudable, it was not politically prudent for him to advocate Kosi Kranti, while campaigning for re-election to the Lok Sabha during the 1980 poll. Infighting in the ruling party and the subsequent backward-forward caste agitation and change in government put an end to the prospect of pushing ahead.
>
> A number of draft plans had been prepared and the landless had begun to feel that perhaps their time had indeed come. But it was not to be. Karpoori Thakur formally inaugurated Kosi Kranti at a well-attended public meeting at Banmankhi on 26 January 1978, with little notice and no political preparation. There is nothing to suggest that the Cabinet was formally consulted. The chief minister had his heart in the right place,

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but was a most disorganised administrator. Appu was increasingly frustrated and finally asked to return to Delhi.

Karpoori Thakur's government fell on 21 April 1979. A great experiment was aborted. Kosi Kranti did not fail. It was never given a fair trial though it was possibly the boldest effort at agrarian reform attempted in Bihar or elsewhere in the country except, maybe, West Bengal and Kerala. If three decades later, we wonder why Naxalism has spread, the answer lies in the failure to conceive and implement such schemes for the relief of Adivasis, Dalits and other rural poor, their unrelenting oppression, and the wilful failure to end the indignities meted out to them.

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My experiences in the Kosi area and, more generally, in Bihar had sharpened my interest in land and water resource development. While still in the PMO, I had urged attention to harnessing the potential of the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin, after the Bihar famine. There had been little positive response. I followed up with a long article, 'Waters of Hope', in the *HT* while editor. After moving to the Gandhi Peace Foundation, I felt the time was ripe for an inter-disciplinary brainstorming on the concept, and organised the first and, to date, the most comprehensive discussion on the integrated development of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (Barak) or GBM Basin.

A national workshop was organised, in 1979, at the GPF, and over one hundred senior officials and professionals and representatives from all the GBM states attended. There was a broad consensus on the concept and the principle of regional cooperation, and agreement on the establishment of a strong focal point in the government to carry matters forward. The principal secretary for agriculture and irrigation, G.V.K.Rao, was named the nodal officer, and set and the ball rolling.

The 1980 elections brought about a change of government, and momentum was lost. One of the key recommendations was that 'all relevant data—meteorological, geological, hydrological, hydrographic and other, as well as large-scale maps and satellite data—should be made available under simplified procedures and without delay to bona fide scholars and research workers. Despite a Right to Information Act, such data remains zealously guarded to this day to ensure the illiteracy of planners, professionals and scholars, who work blind or on the basis of data-theft. The depths of official folly are yet to be plumbed!

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And what was the Janata government doing all this while? It was a high-powered Cabinet that Morarji Desai formed, drawn from all five Janata constituents, and their allies, the CFD and Akali Party. JP had to intervene to stall the initial squabbling for particular portfolios and ranking. Charan Singh got home; H.M. Patel, finance; Atal Behari Vajpayee, external affairs; S.S. Barnala, agriculture and irrigation; Raj Narain, health; Shanti Bhushan, law; George Fernandes, railways; Advani, information and broadcasting. Jagjivan Ram sulked but came in after a while. Sanjiva Reddy was later elected President to signal that the south had not been forgotten.

There were too many prima donnas, and the government tended to function more as an uneasy coalition than a cohesive, single party administration. Charan Singh thought he should be king and, chagrined, set Raj Narain against the prime minister. The pressure on prices persisted and there was student and labour unrest with uncertain employment prospects. Investment remained slack and some observers were concerned that the Five-Year Plans had momentarily taken the form of rolling annual plans with adjustments.

Mrs Gandhi had, by mid-year, become demonstrably active, taunting the government for being afraid of 'a frail woman'. She was unrepentant, refused to testify before the Shah and Gupta (Maruti) Commissions, and defiantly asserted that she had put India back on its feet during the Emergency. Whatever excesses were committed were perpetrated by the states. Sanjay was blameless. The cry of injured innocence rang loud and clear. She charged the Janata with handing over the country to the RSS. (Socialist elements in the Congress, however, openly repudiated her leadership while the party president, Brahmananda Reddy, and the parliamentary party leader, Y.B. Chavan, spoke against the personality cult and rejected her idea of a troika.) Agrarian and rural tensions appeared to be on the rise with periodic reports of Dalit killings, on which Mrs Gandhi capitalised. The Janata's image was not improved by the sudden banning of four school history books by Romila Thapar, Bipin Chandra, Harbans Mukhia and others, on the basis of an anonymous communication.

Even prior to this, the Janata blotted its copybook by dismissing the incumbent Congress governments in nine northern states, where the party had fared disastrously in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. In view of its earlier commanding majority in these very Assemblies (as it had won the previous elections), the Congress had been able to block the 43rd constitutional amendment with its overwhelming majority in the Rajya Sabha, the electoral college for which includes both MPs and MLAs. The

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amendment bill proposed limiting the life of Parliament and the state Assemblies to five years, as was the position before Mrs Gandhi extended their life to six years during the Emergency. Had the amending bill been passed, these Assemblies would have stood dissolved and with the biennial Rajya Sabha elections on the anvil, the Congress would have lost its majority in that House.

Charan Singh wrote to the chief ministers of the nine states advising them to seek a fresh mandate. They refused. The government thereupon responded by issuing proclamations dissolving those Assemblies. The acting president, B.D. Jatti, demurred but gave in within twenty-four hours and the deed was done. The dismissal of the nine governments was unwept and unsung. Many had been guilty of Emergency excesses and some were virtually under the sway of Sanjay Gandhi. Nevertheless, a somewhat dangerous and ambiguous constitutional precedent had been set, namely, that there must be 'harmony' between the electorate and its representatives in a state and that, federalism notwithstanding, the Centre's discretion in the matter was final.

The Janata was also unprincipled in inviting defectors from the Congress after the party's poll debacle. This deflected the traffic away from the CFD, to which these Congressmen were originally headed, and was instrumental in persuading Jagjivan Ram to abandon the thought of holding out as a separate entity and to throw in his lot with the Janata Party. Both episodes weakened the moral standing of the government.

A year after the Janata assumed office, Mrs Gandhi had bounced back with Congress victories in Andhra and Karnataka and a reasonably good showing in Maharashtra where it was able to forge a coalition.

Meanwhile, Bihar took the lead in accepting reservation for OBCs on the basis of the state's Mungeri Commission report, a precursor to Mandal. The real issue was jobs.

A few months later, the Janata headed towards a split, with Morarji's paternalism not proving a soothing balm for Charan Singh's wounded ego. His handling of the sensitive home portfolio had been inept and he escalated matters by threatening to have Mrs Gandhi lynched. Nor had Chandrashekhar displayed organisational and intellectual leadership as Janata president.

With Devraj Urs from her party ruling strong in Karnataka, Mrs Gandhi contested a by-election from Chickmagalur and was returned to the Lok Sabha to reclaim her position as leader of the Congress (I). She immediately defied the Privileges Committee of the Lok Sabha on an issue of having fudged replies to questions on Maruti in the last Lok Sabha, on the ground that this would entail disclosing her defence if

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called upon by the Shah Commission, before which she had refused to appear! She was on a come-back trail and was unmindful of being reckless. The Janata's image had, meanwhile, taken another knock over the charges of corruption against Morarji's son, Kanti Desai, which brought business in the Rajya Sabha to a standstill.

By October 1978, things had drifted to a point when thirty-six academics and other well-known figures, including myself, issued a statement warning that history was in danger of repeating itself and the country appeared to be drifting towards the kind of situation that had prevailed in 1973 and 1974 and brought on the Emergency, as a result of Mrs Gandhi's exploitation of the rot in the system. Reference was made to undignified in-fighting within the Janata Party and the glorification of authoritarian tendencies. 'The parliamentary system is being thwarted, political will is being sapped, public life is being debased and trivialised and growing cynicism and anger are evident everywhere.' It advocated decentralisation, the establishment of an ombudsman (Lok Pal) and party cohesion.

Within the year, it was Charan Singh who addressed the nation as prime minister, from the ramparts of the Red Fort, on 15 August 1979. The proximate cause for the changeover was the criticism that had erupted against dual membership within the Janata Party, the reference being to the former Jana Sangh members' association with the RSS. The sequence of events had been set in motion because of Charan Singh's overweening ego. He had tried hard for the prime minister's post once the Janata Party was in power, but had failed to muster enough support. Morarji, he felt, had robbed him of that chance. In the summer of 1978, he quit the government after an abortive and clumsy attempt to arrest Mrs Gandhi, and followed up by accusing his colleagues of 'impotence' for not launching a Nuremburg-type trial against her. This crowned her as a martyr.

Later Charan Singh rejoined the government as deputy prime minister and finance minister, ignoring his previous fears of 'dual membership'. He then conspired with the Socialist leader, Raj Narain, to topple the government. Some in the party urged the PM to step aside and let Jagjivan Ram take over; Morarji was not inclined to oblige. Defections, however, reduced his government to a minority, compelling his resignation.

The President, Sanjiva Reddy rightly called on the leader of the Opposition, Y.B. Chavan, to form a government. He returned the mandate as the Congress lacked a majority. Charan Singh was prepared to throw in his lot with the Congress if they agreed to make him the

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prime minister. The Congress cunningly baited Charan Singh with a promise of support. The President accordingly called him, giving him twenty-four days to prove his majority.

Charan Singh was in office, but Mrs Gandhi was in power, and soon pulled the rug from under his feet. Charan Singh faced the Lok Sabha as prime minister only to announce his resignation. Immediately thereafter, he discovered that 'communal and authoritarian forces' had combined to frustrate the building of a Gandhian society and advised the President to dissolve the House and order fresh elections. Finding no alternative, the President did so, leaving the country in the hands of an 'irresponsible' government that had not faced Parliament for a single day. The Rajya Sabha was also prorogued.

Charan Singh, remained in office, charged with conducting fresh elections, but on strict cautionary terms that barred the government from taking any major administrative or policy decisions, or authorising any new spending. In effect, some kind of President's Rule prevailed at the Centre. It was a bizarre situation. There were cries for impeaching the President, establishing a Presidential Council, and adopting a convention that would keep the Rajya Sabha in watch-dog session in such contingencies. All this was beating the air. Charan Singh remained caretaker prime minister for five months and won a place in the national Valhalla between Rajghat and the Red Fort where, in due course, his ashes were interred.

Early in January 1980, the country went to the polls. The Congress (I) was returned to power. The Janata Party fractured, with Jana Sangh elements forming the BJP. Mrs Gandhi was back as prime minister. The wheel had turned full circle.

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10

AN UNHAPPY SECOND COMING

It was a resounding victory against a squabbling and non-performing Janata-Lok Dal leadership, and in favour of stability and strong government. As usual, the swing of the pendulum delivered more seats than votes to the winner. The Janata and Lok Dal divided their vote in northern India giving a clear advantage to the Congress which won back much of its traditional SC/ST/minority vote bank. Within weeks thereafter, the Janata-Lok Dal splintered, and from the debris emerged the Janata Party (Chandrashekhar), the Bharatiya Janata Party or former Jana Sangh (Vajpayee), the Janata-Secular (Raj Narain), the Lok Dal (Charan Singh) and the Congress (Urs) to which Jagjivan Ram gravitated. The CPI had also split with the veteran, S.A. Dange, walking out to form a National Communist Party (NCP), sympathetic to Mrs Gandhi. Indian polity was undergoing a process of churning and reorganisation.

Mrs Gandhi's very majority gave her the opportunity to resist adventurist pressures, and she could have kept out Sanjay Gandhi and others who had been prominent during the Emergency. Yet she was not apologetic about what had happened, and cited the mess the Janata Party had left behind as retrospective justification for the bitter pill she said she had had to administer.

The crises that erupted in Afghanistan and Assam kept her preoccupied from the very start. King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan was deposed in 1973 by President Daud. He was, in turn, assassinated with his entire Cabinet in 1978, during the Saur revolution under Noor Mohammed Tarakki, whose Left regime was further radicalised with a bloody takeover by another leftist politician, Hafizullah Amin.

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Despite the turbulence, India's traditional friendship with this near-neighbour remained unimpaired. The Americans, however, were alarmed at the turn of events both in Afghanistan and in Iran, where their embassy was stormed by revolutionary mobs, bringing the Shah under extreme pressure. The Cold War axis had shifted to this theatre. Anxious to secure their interests, the Soviets intervened militarily in Afghanistan on Christmas Day, 1979. Caught up in the transition to a new government after a just-concluded general election, India—then a member of the Security Council—abstained from voting on a resolution condemning the Soviet invasion, and alienated Afghan opinion. Though the prime minister did call upon the Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan soon after the initial Security Council vote, it took a decade and more for Indo-Afghan relations to be restored to an even keel.

The geo-strategic situation in the region was suddenly transformed and Pakistan emerged as a military ally of the US and a key frontline state in its war against the 'evil empire'. The consequences had a searing influence on subsequent global relationships. As its price for collaboration and its role as the base for US operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan extracted its pound of flesh. Lieutenant General K.M. Arif, who was President Zia-ul-Haq's principal military aide and acting Army Chief, negotiated the arrangement along with Pakistan's foreign secretary, Agha Shahi, in 1981.

Pakistan refused to be a mere conduit for US arms to Afghanistan but insisted that American military assistance be routed to the Afghan mujahideen via Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), which took responsibility for its distribution. It is estimated that over the years a goodly percentage of the small arms and equipment supplied, including AK-47s, were diverted by the ISI to fuel its proxy wars against India, in Punjab and Kashmir.

Secondly, the US agreed to turn a blind eye on Pakistan's nuclear programme. This gave open licence to Dr A.Q. Khan, a Pakistani nuclear metallurgist, to 'father' Pakistan's nuclear bomb and mastermind what later came to be known as a nuclear Wal-Mart, with no questions asked.

Thirdly, the 'good Muslim' or hard-line Islamist was called upon to fight the communist atheists. This was to breed the Taliban and other radical jehadi groups that were trained, armed and patronised by Pakistan in Afghanistan, and soon made Pakistan the hub of global terror.

Fourthly, in order to keep the Afghan warlords happy and provide a goodly side-income to all players, poppy cultivation was not discouraged, and Afghanistan became a major narcotics outlet with strong Pakistani

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links. Drug money was to play a role in financing all manner of dubious activity. By its actions, the US added to the problems of Islamic radicalisation, terror and human rights violations, nuclear proliferation and a widening drug culture, against all of which it inveighed. India paid heavily for this, and Pakistan did not escape the backlash either. Afghanistan remains a bleeding wound to this day, with US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, tellingly describing America's Afghanistan-Pakistan policy during this period as 'incoherent'.

These unfolding events prompted some Indians to favour an Indo-Pakistan détente. Mrs Gandhi, however, remained wary of that 'foreign hand'. She disdained Pakistan's overtures for a balanced and mutual reduction of forces and would not differentiate between the rhetoric and reality of politics and diplomacy.

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Mrs Gandhi was confronted with another cause for alarm, almost as soon as she was sworn into office. This related to the demographic concerns raised by the continuing influx of 'foreigners' into Assam, largely from East Pakistan but, to some extent, also from Nepal. This was a long-standing problem that pre-dated Independence. Villagers from the overcrowded districts of East Bengal were encouraged by the Raj to settle in Assam, where they introduced crops like deep-water paddy and jute and provided labour for infrastructural development.

Adivasi labour too was imported from Bihar and Bengal for the tea gardens, and labour from other regions to work the coal mines, oil fields and plywood factories. There was, in fact, an even earlier history of Bengali administrators being employed by the British after their conquest of Assam, as they were familiar with British systems of administration and knew English. During the Second World War, too, fresh Bengali peasant settlements were encouraged as part of the grow-more-food campaign.

All this created cultural, linguistic and ethnic tensions. Assamese was treated as no more than a Bengali dialect and, accordingly, displaced from schools and courts between 1836 and 1872. Wartime military requirements, post-War refugee resettlement and development projects entailed further inroads into designated tribal belts and blocks within Assam. The land alienation that ensued was increasingly resented by tribal communities in the plains.

Tripura had, over some decades, been reduced to a minority tribal state dominated by migrant Bengalis. The continuing influx of East Pakistani/Bangladeshi migrants was now seen to have not merely

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economic but political, cultural and communal dimensions. The writing was on the wall.

A by-election to the Mangaldoi parliamentary constituency in March 1978 brought matters to a head. It was demanded that the names of foreign nationals be weeded out from the electoral rolls. The process was stayed by a court order, and the matter kept simmering until the general elections were announced in 1979. According to the All-Assam Student's Union (AASU), which led the so-called 3-D movement for the 'detection, deletion and deportation' of aliens under the banner of the Gana Sangram Parishad, the number of foreign infiltrators had touched a million by 1961, climbed to 2.3 million by 1971 and was around 3.5 million in 1979, with some 1.8 million, or almost 20 per cent of the total state electorate, enrolled in the voter's list.

The chief election commissioner decided that in view of the time constraint he would take the 1977 rolls as a base, subject to deletions by returning officers, if satisfied that certain names had been erroneously entered. The AASU denounced this 'betrayal' and launched a movement of non-violent protest. Millions participated. The state was brought under President's Rule in December. Contrary to the governor's advice, however, Assembly elections were ordered in January 1980. These resulted in violence and clashes and actual polling could be held only in fourteen Cachar (Bengali) constituencies, thus exacerbating Assamese-Bengali tensions.

The AASU put forward eight demands. These included the 3-D's; stronger border protection to prevent infiltration; the issue of ID cards with photographs to Indian voters residing in Assam; constitutional safeguards for all citizens in the north-eastern states for the next fifteen to twenty years to protect indigenous regional identities; freedom for Assam to reject citizenship certificates issued by district authorities in West Bengal and Tripura; and the withdrawal of powers delegated to state governments to grant citizenship certificates, so that those deported from Assam did not return with a new set of citizenship certificates issued by other states. During the ensuing talks with the Centre, Mrs Gandhi and the new home minister, Zail Singh, broadly concurred with the first five demands, but remitted the last three for fuller and wider consideration as other states were involved. The AASU suspended its agitation against the despatch of oil outside the state; and an intensive revision of Assam's electoral rolls was ordered.

The Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF) sent a team consisting of Gandhians, the political scientist, Bashiruddin Ahmed, and me to Assam. After studying the situation, we put together a report that dealt with the

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historical, cultural and economic background and posed certain issues for consideration. Foremost among those was the definition of the term 'foreigner', in view of special dispensations regarding persons migrating to India from Pakistan, more so, East Pakistan and Bangladesh. The legacy of the Partition could not be ignored.

The Constitution mentions 19 July 1948 as the defining date for citizenship for migrants from Pakistan. The Nehru-Liaqat Ali Pact extended this to 31 December 1950. Speaking in Parliament later, Nehru referred to 1952 as an appropriate date while the Indira-Mujib Pact of 1972 contained an understanding that since Bangladesh only came into being on 26 March 1971, that would be the cut-off date for 'Bangladeshis' entering India.

The acceptance by India of this cut-off date for 'Bangladeshi' infiltrators was a political understanding. It by no means legally vested Indian citizenship on foreigners who had entered earlier. Adding to these complexities was the fact that Indo-Pakistan passports were not introduced until 1952 while the Citizenship Act only came into force in 1955. The 1951 census underestimated Assam's Muslim population as many families had moved out or gone into hiding on account of the delayed post-Partition riots and exodus in the eastern sector.

Some caveats are in order. Bangladesh was committed to taking back the approximately ten million Bangladeshis who sought refuge in India after that date, and Mujib pleaded that the new nation with its shattered infrastructure and economy should not be burdened with any further backlog. Mrs Gandhi agreed; but this meant that the future disposition of the others—the non-Bangladeshi foreigners (essentially Pakistanis or the stateless)—remained to be determined.

A second fallacy that needed to be dispelled was the assumption that the bulk of this residual category was Muslim. Of the 967,000 'foreigners' estimated by the home ministry to have entered the country illegally between 1961 and 1971, the vast majority were again non-Muslim, including Nepalis who had managed to get around the Restricted Area Permit regulations. Census figures indicated that the Nepali-speaking population in Assam had more than tripled between 1951 and 1971, to 353,673. Decades after Partition, it was no longer possible or prudent to label illicit Hindu immigrants as 'refugees' and Muslims as 'infiltrators'.

The government was uneasy about declaring some Assam residents as 'stateless' even temporarily, until their cases were disposed of, although this nomenclature is internationally recognised and had found a place in the Indo-Sri Lanka settlement in respect of Ceylon Indians. The government also erred in seemingly treating the Assam movement

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leaders as secessionists, which they clearly were not, and in not being more patient in overcoming their anxieties over what was, without doubt, a difficult and delicate problem, in respect of which the Centre could not evade its share of responsibility.

The Assam movement spokesmen sought a number of additional safeguards. These included some form of dual citizenship, the enactment of something akin to Article 370 (which pertains to greater autonomy for J&K), and an extension of the tribal safeguards under the Sixth Schedule to Assam.

These, however, raised complex issues and could not be lightly contemplated. Somewhat more practical was the proposal to end the practice of granting citizenship by registration and limiting this to naturalisation. Assam had a point in arguing that the burden of illegal migration and of those found stateless should be properly shared. Other states would, obviously, need to be consulted, but Assam could be compensated through accelerated development and job creation, to gainfully absorb the additional numbers.

One form of non-cooperation that was mistakenly pressed was a boycott of the 1981 census, which was, therefore, not held. This deprived Assam of a valuable administrative and demographic tool that could have assisted understanding, and pointed to possible solutions.

The GPF delegation's report was followed up, a few months later, by an appeal by twenty-three concerned citizens who endorsed its plea for the suspension of the Assam movement, to facilitate a resumption of the dialogue. It also asked the government to withdraw notifications issued under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, revoke detention orders and resume talks. At the same time, better border management was indicated with vigorous patrolling, including river patrolling, mandatory birth, marriage and death registration, and the expeditious issue of national/electoral photo-identity cards as done in Sikkim, with aliens/foreigners/stateless categorised as such pending further action.

The GPF took on a mediatory role in the crisis, through the latter part of 1980 and into 1981. The GPF director, Radhakrishna, and I travelled to Gauhati and met influential elements on all sides. They were receptive, and anxious to find a way out of the impasse. The youthful AASU leaders were an earnest and dedicated lot, but a trifle immature and lacking depth and perspective. Yet, they were very much in command and enjoyed wide public support. Both Prafulla Mahanta, president, and Brighu Phukan, secretary of the AASU appeared committed to a policy of collective leadership. They had constituted so many and such

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large committees that getting something approaching a consensus from them was a laborious process.

The issues of the base year and cut-off year had been resolved long back, despite continuing and confused rhetoric. Both sides had agreed to tackle the 'foreigners' issue in three segments. Those who entered Assam in 1951-61 were to be accepted as citizens and allowed to remain undisturbed. Entrants after 25 March 1971 were to be deleted from the voter's list and deported or dispersed to other states. The discussion turned on the status of the 1961-71 segment—officially assessed at around 500,000 persons.

The Centre was willing to accept the GPF formulation that the names of these people be deleted from the electoral rolls, but that they might be granted residence-cum-work permits, though temporarily stateless, until such time as their status was determined or for a period not exceeding five years, whichever was less. Further, to the extent that deportation or dispersal was precluded or delayed, Assam should receive special development-cum-rehabilitation grants. Following considerable internal discussion and after securing certain official clarifications through me, the AASU also signified its broad willingness to negotiate on this basis, only to resile from this position subsequently.

One issue regarding which the AASU was greatly exercised (and to which the Centre had no good answer) was the alienation of lands within the tribal belts and blocks. The matter was to erupt later with considerable fury. Answering a parliamentary question in 1969, the Union minister for rehabilitation had stated that Assam's capacity to absorb refugees was nearing saturation and that its 'quota' for the resettlement of 'new migrants' had, accordingly, been fixed at 12,000 families (or roughly 60,000 persons). By 1975 some 30,000 'new immigrant' families had been resettled outside the North-east and West Bengal, and Assam insisted that even if it were to accept the 1961-71 migrants, its quota must be limited to the stipulated 12,000 families.

The Centre argued that the 'quota' referred only to land resettlement and that many more had been and could be rehabilitated through grants for self-employment, purchase of assets and house construction. Taking these into account, the registered 1961-71 immigrants numbered 214,000, apart from those who had settled down with relatives and could not now be treated as foreigners and uprooted and sent away. Assamese opinion was, however, concerned with both culture and land and feared that the Assamese language might be swamped if more and more Bengali speakers were accepted.

The GPF proposed that an assurance be given that notwithstanding

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any demographic changes over the next twenty years, Assamese shall continue to remain the official language of the administration and the medium of instruction, without detriment to the legitimate cultural and linguistic interests of other ethnic and linguistic minorities in the state. The alternative of detaching Cachar, a preponderantly Bengali-speaking district from Assam, was not favoured as this would entail a further reorganisation of the north-east region and could trigger other demands.

Unfortunately, positions hardened. The AASU's support base dwindled with Bengalis, Muslims, tribals and Leftists gradually distancing themselves or even opposing the movement. The All-Assam Muslim Students Union (AAMSU) broke away, thus sharpening the communal divide. There was violence, culminating in efforts to prevent the conduct of state elections that were due in March 1983, on the expiry of President's Rule.

In Delhi, the Opposition enjoyed a majority in the Rajya Sabha, and insisted on a constitutional amendment limiting any proclamation for the extension of an emergency exclusively to Assam. Finding her hands tied, Mrs Gandhi ordered elections. Efforts to thwart the poll intensified. Bridges and culverts were damaged or destroyed to impede movement. Violence climaxed in a ghastly massacre by Lalung (Tiwa) plains tribals of over 1600 settlers in a tribal reserve at Nellie, in Nagaon district, causing further riots involving wider sections of the community. The turnout in some constituencies was down to 10 or even 5 per cent with overall voting at no more than 33 per cent. Most denounced the poll. But not to have held the elections could have created a dangerous vacuum.

The carnage caused national revulsion and shame. Yet it would be simplistic to assume it was the result of forcing the election. The truth was more complex. Two kinds of violence merged: anti-electoral fury and pent up anger and hurt over land alienation and what was perceived as other ancient wrongs. The government approach was ham-handed, but AASU was by no means blameless.

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Assam was not the only trouble spot. Earlier, while with the GPF, JP had appointed a civil rights committee under Justice V.M. Tarkunde, a dedicated human rights activist, with Nabakrushna Choudhury, K.G. Kannabiran, Arun Shourie, me and a few others to monitor and investigate the killing of Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh in so-called police 'encounters'. Careful field investigations through our Andhra colleagues showed that quite a few deaths were the result of cold-blooded killings.

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This was possibly the first systematic exposure of such 'encounter' killings and the committee's reports were widely noticed.

Another initiative we took at the GPF, in concert with Citizens for Democracy, which I chaired for a time, was to promote Voters' Councils to educate people about their local and democratic rights, and to work for electoral reform.

Even as the GPF, AVARD, the Sarva Sewa Sangh, and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi were engaged in a host of constructive tasks, Mrs Gandhi was out to wreak vengeance on these bodies, which she held responsible for her downfall through Jayaprakash Narayan. The instrument she chose for this venomously vindictive yet petty persecution was an obscure Rajasthan High Court judge, Putushottam Das Kudal, who was appointed head of a commission to inquire into the affairs of these four institutions and other organisations 'closely connected' with them.

'It would be impossible to find in the annals of democratic government, an inquisition so strikingly similar to the US House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities of the McCarthy era than the Kudal Commission on Gandhian organisations,' wrote A.G.Noorani, the well-known commentator and advocate, in his tract entitled, 'The Witch Hunt'.

The Kudal Commission was appointed on 17 February 1982 and was still mired in futility five years later when it was finally wound up. It was originally set up to inquire into allegations that the Mahatma's image was being tarnished, but ended up as a fishing expedition with vague terms of reference and with no greater objective than that of attempting to damn and destroy all Gandhian organisations. This was true of the entire proceedings: sweeping charges of grave dereliction without an iota of justification, even though commissions of inquiry are supposed to look into matters of 'definite public importance'.

As the subsequent Lok Sabha debate showed, the object was to smear and harass those deemed to be with JP as opposed to Vinoba Bhave in the Sarvodaya divide. 'Somewhere along the way,' I wrote, 'the Commission got its Gandhis mixed up and from preserving the Gandhian ethic digressed into defending the political interests of certain other Gandhis.' The JP-Gandhians had supped with the Janata devil. Hearsay and conjecture were allowed to prevail over objectivity, fact and commonsense, resulting in as many as sixty-four stay orders in high courts up and down the country. Over 1000 organisations were arraigned. Once their files were summoned, they were hounded, their grants were mostly frozen and their work brought to a standstill. More than 190 adult education societies (in a country that bears the disgrace of having

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the largest illiterate population in the world) were investigated. Some just closed down.

Kudal also came up with draconian recommendations, which reflected deep suspicion of voluntary agencies at a time when the government was promising to transfer power from power brokers to the people. Much of the commission's work was a travesty of justice, as it was based on hearsay and anonymous complaints. The charges against me personally were that I was not qualified to be a (Rural Development) Fellow of the Gandhi Peace Foundation drawing emoluments of Rs 2000 per month, and had not submitted any report on my work on leaving the organisation in May 1982, to become the editor of *The Indian Express*.

Among these 'pending allegations' was one 'that the GPF had hosted a workshop on the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna Basin with Verghese as the prime mover. It had been held with the dubious motive of passing on secret data on the Ganga basin to 'foreign powers'. The facts adduced about foreign funding and foreign participation were patently untrue; yet Kudal felt he must dig deeper! Also impugned were five maps (published as part of my 1977 Coromandel Lecture), which showed the GBM basin in no greater detail than in any school atlas. The map pertaining to a proposed Saptamukhi Dam in the Ganges delta was taken from and acknowledged to an ESCAP (the former ECAFE) publication. Far from depicting 'secret' and 'sensitive' information 'liable to be useful to an enemy . . . and affect the sovereignty and integrity of India and the security of the state', it was an innocuous illustrative map that would have been of no comfort to any 'enemy'.

The government, nevertheless, handed over these investigations to the CBI which finally said that it was not possible to register a case under the Official Secrets Act, after which the matter was dropped. Yet Kudal was most anxious that I appear before him. In response to a notice, I replied that I had already answered all the queries in detail and that there was no infringement of the government's Map Restriction Policy. I said the GPF workshop had been attended by several top-ranking government officials, including the surveyor general of India and none had had anything to say about the maps. In the circumstances, I said, no useful purpose would be served by any further participation in the proceedings of the commission.

Even so, I had a bone to pick with the information and broadcasting minister, H.K.L. Bhagat and the home minister, Buta Singh, and wrote to tell them off. The Press Information Bureau had, under instructions, cooked up a 'summary' of the Kudal report. It contained a number of concoctions with the mala fide purpose of planting 'evidence' in support

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of charges of 'treason'. *The Hindustan Times* and *Blitz* carried the planted excerpts from this smear-sheet.

In my letter to Bhagat, I said that I wanted 'to report a case of palpable misuse of the Government of India's information machinery to plant defamatory stories and fabrications in the media 'about innocent citizens such as myself'. I called on him to investigate the matter:

> I trust that the investigation will not be to establish how this silly and shabby enterprise occurred but why such dirty tricks, which are becoming endemic, should be mounted at all. Dirt in any case sticks to those that handle it. And there is an awful stink coming from certain quarters these days.

To Buta Singh I wrote that I was startled to be told by the newspapers that he had named me among 'notable individuals' against whom the Kudal Commission had given its findings, based on which certain MPs had demanded action on charges of treason. I noted that the (map) charges against me had been dropped as unsubstantiated and unproven. 'I take it,' I said, 'that the Government of India has not adopted a new jurisprudence under which an unsubstantiated allegation supersedes the informed verdict on that very charge by the trial court.' I sought a formal clarification and correction. As expected, none was forthcoming.

Another piece of nonsense advanced by Kudal was regarding a survey of bonded labour done by the GPF, in part collaboration with Heidelberg University. The charge was that the GPF had assisted West Germany to obtain pathological data that would enable the Western powers to develop biological weapons against India! How utterly absurd can one get! And yet Kudal wanted more time to probe this 'pending allegation'.

Public opinion was fed up, and even many in the government felt increasingly foolish and uncomfortable. Kudal was finally told to wind up his pathetic labours. He had done his bidding, and retired into the obscurity from which he had emerged in a ludicrous suit of shining armour. The Gandhian organisations were bled white, prevented from doing anything but running between the commission and the courts for years on end, and compelled to wind down in consequence. None really recovered. The government-Kudal combine murdered Gandhi a second time. The Gandhian legacy was dealt a body-blow.

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In Delhi, Mrs Gandhi suffered a deep personal loss with Sanjay Gandhi's tragic death, in 1980, in an air crash that should never have happened.

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He was piloting a Pitts Special, a bi-plane most often used for aerobatics and stunt flying. He had lived dangerously in defiance of any rule book, had streaked across the political firmament and crashed like a meteor. Mrs Gandhi was shattered. On whom could she lean, surrounded as she was by servitors? It was her more sedate and shy elder son, Rajiv, who gave up commercial flying to join his mother. I wrote to Mrs Gandhi, a mother, to commiserate the loss of a son. In due course I received a formal response. She recalled Sanjay's zestful energy.

*

With some others, I had been instrumental in founding the Editor's Guild of India in place of the older AINEC, which had been taken over by trade journals and lobbyists. It was as a member of a Guild fact-finding mission that I went to Ahmedabad, along with Mahendra Desai, Inder Malhotra and K. Narendra, early in 1981, to report on the coverage of the anti-reservation agitation by the Gujarat press. Charges of bias and distortions in the Gujarati media had prompted the Guild to investigate the facts.

The genesis of the agitation by junior doctors was the enhancing of SC/ST reservations in postgraduate medical institutions from the earlier 20 per cent (1975) to 25 per cent, in order to accommodate OBCs. The new dispensation also introduced the principles of carry forward, inter-changeability among the reserved categories, and a roster system for promotions. Long suppressed emotions came into the open.

The ending of Patel or Patidar political dominance by the Congress-led KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim) alliance and subsequent differences within the ruling party had created tensions. The beating to death of a Dalit youth by a group of Patels triggered violence. Harijans across the board joined the agitation, supported by Harijans from Ahmedabad's textile mills where they dominated spinning departments. Production ground to a halt. Tensions mounted. Attitudes hardened. Polarisation followed. The Dalits took a beating at the hands of the *savarnas* (caste Hindus).

The Gujarati media took sides and published unverified reports in poster headlines, adding fuel to the fire. Perspective was lost. Newspaper rivalries made matters worse, as did the practice of publishing paid 'corrective advertisements' that were lucrative but provided room for much polemical, cheque-book journalism. Official briefings were inadequate and sometimes erroneous. Important clarifications and corrections were not always promptly issued. The Guild team hoped the Gujarat press would look inwards and institute corrective measures.

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Regrettably, the same weaknesses were to show up, in an even worse form, in 2002.

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With general elections looming at the end of 1979, Rajni Kothari, Romesh Thapar, Bashiruddin Ahmed, Kuldip Nayar, Prof Mrinal Dutta-Chaudhuri and I prepared a paper called 'Agenda for India'*, a title taken from an earlier essay of mine. The object was to point the way forward.

The thesis was that three decades of development had brought the lower tiers of the underprivileged into the social pyramid. These sections would no longer be submissive and must be made partners in governance and growth. The polity was still smaller than the population, but had grown beyond the elites and upper castes that inherited the Raj. Certain middle peasant castes had dramatically improved their position.

The system, however, had spawned a parallel economy of black money, electorally manipulated vote banks and a parallel political structure based on a new breed of politicians and dadas trading in money and muscle. What was needed was justice through decentralisation, agrarian reform, the provision of basic services to all, the organisation of the rural poor to enable them to act collectively, the affirmation of tribal, Dalit and gender rights and the uplift of backward and neglected regions like the North-east, Jharkhand and Bastar.

It was necessary to go beyond the Westminster model and build a more liberal federal polity with smaller states and districts and an empowered panchayati raj to deliver justice at the grassroots level. We called for administrative reform, with emphasis on the districts, police-and-intelligence autonomy with accountability, a civil rights commission and encouragement of voluntary agencies. In the field of external relations we advocated movement from non-alignment to regional cooperation, South Asian rapprochement and disarmament.

The 'Agenda' was widely debated and gained support, as there was a sense that the old Nehruvian consensus was in disrepair and needed to be refurbished. Mrs Gandhi, however, had other ideas. She moved to dismiss the governments of those states where the Congress won

*This was circulated to some hundred persons around the country, revised and then published under fifty signatures as a discussion paper, for a national convention held in April 1980. Thereafter, it underwent further revision and expansion and was published in August 1981 for restructuring Indian society as a more just, humane and democratic order.

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sweeping victories, paying back the now fragmented Janata Party in its own sorry coin.

She then got an All-India Conference of Lawyers to debate an appropriate form of government for India, the discussion being nudged towards a fundamental shift in the system from parliamentary to presidential. This was a command performance. She then went on to transfer and dismiss governors on the ground that they held office at the pleasure of the prime minister (acting through the President).

Some months later, the chief minister of Maharashtra, A.R. Antulay, convened a meeting of the intelligentsia to canvass the idea that since a war with Pakistan seemed inevitable with the resumption to it of US arms supplies, there was need for rallying round the leader in the interests of national solidarity. Mrs Gandhi herself was prone to seeing a foreign hand everywhere and used this to whip up a kind of war hysteria. She had, in any case, assumed a presidential style of governance unrestrained by checks and balances. Ordinance raj had been resorted to, reducing the Parliament to a ratifying body, and there was growing impatience with an independent judiciary. The manner in which the government rejected the report of the Maruti Commission, for instance, showed contempt for the judicial process.

A growing personalisation of power was manifest in the prime minister's extraordinary visits to several states to 'evaluate' their performance. A photograph of the 'Bhopal durbar' showed the PM seated at the CM's desk in the secretariat, confronting local ministers and officials, while the wretched 'yes madam, no madam, thank you madam' CM sat behind her, trying to look important. The PM also addressed Secretariat employees. The obvious impropriety of this exercise in terms of federal relations was disregarded.

Anything other than the captive media had been reviled and threatened. The second Press Commission under Justice Goswami was dismantled, just as it had begun to draft its report, after fifteen months of labour. The commission had, quite unnecessarily, submitted its resignation to the new government, as a matter of courtesy. It was promptly accepted, the argument being that it would be better to have a new commission with more comprehensive terms of reference and less 'political membership'. A year later, she went on to say that she did not favour autonomy for radio and television right then. It would be necessary to build the people's confidence, and where the press did not cooperate, it was for AIR and Doordarshan to step in and create a congenial atmosphere for development!

Another questionable development was the insidious resort to the

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doctrine of executive privilege that Nixon had pleaded in the US. This was claimed by the Bihar government with regard to disclosing certain files pertaining to the notorious Bhagalpur 'blindings', when policemen blinded several criminals while in custody as they felt the criminal justice system would never deliver justice, and that summary punishment was therefore in order. Sadly, the general public welcomed this illegal and sadistic approach, and took up cudgels for the guilty policemen when they were later arraigned.

Another instance pertained to the Thal-Vaishet fertiliser project near Bombay when a unanimous decision to award the contract to an American firm was suddenly annulled and the contract given to two other parties. When an MP raised the matter in the Lok Sabha, rather than answer the charge that various extraneous and unsavoury considerations had come into play, an inquiry was instituted under the Official Secrets Act on how the files had leaked.

The government also tried to scuttle a judicial inquiry into the breaching of the Macchu Dam-II in Saurashtra, which washed away Morvi town and took over 2000 lives. The government sought thirty-seven adjournments over the next eighteen months and just when Justice P.D. Desai was about to commence taking evidence, the commission he was heading was wound up. Executive privilege was claimed when the government was required to produce the report of the then Rajkot district collector, who had made a meticulous assessment of the situation. The official plea was that the disclosure of confidential records pertaining to 'affairs of state' would injure the public interest whereas non-disclosure would not adversely affect the administration of justice. It was no more than a cover to protect rank corruption.

On the social front, regardless of Mrs Gandhi's election promises, atrocities against Dalits appeared to be on the rise. So also tribal unrest, rape as an instrument of asserting community superiority, and communal riots that tended to spread rapidly from urban tinder boxes to the rural hinterland. The Moradabad riots were typical, the clash between Muslims and Dalits reflecting increasing competition among upwardly mobile social groups.

Amidst all of this, there occurred another event that was to stir latent passions. This was the conversion, in the autumn of 1981, of a few thousand Harijans to Islam in three districts of southern Tamil Nadu, but notably in and around a place called Meenakshipuram. Mass conversions were seen as evidence of force and fraud and monetary inducements, and it was thought that the bounty of Arab petro-dollars had funded a 'political invasion' and entrapped Dalits. The

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Meenakshipuram conversions, however, represented a social rather than a political or religious stirring. To believe otherwise would be to confuse cause with consequence. Pushed to the wall, the Dalits and Adivasis had begun to assert their right to a life of dignity and self-respect, by entirely peaceful means.

Why mass conversions? Because they found that their condition was defined by community and not by individual status. As long as they vainly sought admission into the fold, they were trapped in a system in which they could not grow. Cruelly kept outside, they found release in leaving the fold. So, like the Black Muslims in the United States, they turned away to seek a new identity. Thirty years earlier, under Ambedkar's influence, some of his flock had embraced Buddhism. A similar trend was evident in the North-east where young tribals often embraced Christianity as part of a process of modernisation, and not through any particular missionary effort. Likewise, in their search for a new identity, Metei nationalists in the Imphal Valley are returning to the pre-Vaishnavite Manipur Sanamahi faith and script that they gave up over two centuries ago.

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Meanwhile, the Garhwal Lok Sabha by-election was announced, and yet another institution, the Election Commission, began to feel the heat. H.N. Bahuguna had been wooed back into the Congress on the eve of the 1980 poll, and was returned to the Lok Sabha on the party's ticket from Garhwal. He was appointed secretary general of the Congress (I), ranking second only to Mrs Gandhi. Differences, however, arose and a disillusioned Bahuguna quit the party and resigned his seat in order to seek vindication through a by-election. In adopting this principled path, he was openly challenging the tradition of implicit loyalty to the leader, on which the edifice of the Congress rested.

He had, therefore, to be stopped at any cost. The by-election was initially put off by thirteen months. Thereafter, the PM, five Congress chief ministers and several ministers entered the fray. Police reinforcements were summoned from Himachal, Haryana and Punjab, without the knowledge of the Election Commission, ostensibly on grounds of an inadequacy of local forces.

There was a clear misuse of the official machinery: Section 144 (pertaining to 'prohibitory orders' against unlawful assembly) was arbitrarily imposed and lifted, transfers were effected, and the prohibition on the sale of arms and ammunition in the constituency was defeated by the issue of cartridges from the neighbouring district on the basis of

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official orders. A fleet of state-owned helicopters was inducted to facilitate easy movement by Congress (I) campaigners, and firearms were freely used to capture booths on the day of the poll. Counter-charges of violence and booth capturing by Bahuguna's men in the Badri-Kedarnath segment were not substantiated by newsmen, district officials, the police or local residents. On the other hand, Bahuguna's charges of unfair practices were upheld by the Election Commission after due investigation, and the poll was countermanded to the huge embarrassment and anger of the Congress (I).

Mrs Gandhi defended the indefensible. Her assertion at an official press conference in Vigyan Bhavan that certain officials accompanying her were attacked was totally disproved by a Citizens for Democracy fact-finding team consisting of Ajit Bhattacharjea, Bashiruddin Ahmed and myself, after meticulous inquiry.

No sooner was a re-poll ordered on 20 June 1981 than the ruling party launched a campaign to stall that too, in view of 'the surcharged atmosphere of class war'. Another date, 30 September, was suggested, but as it approached more excuses were offered—weather, landslides, examinations, seasonal migration. The Congress (I) asked for a date in the summer of 1982 but the CEC announced that the poll would be held on 22 November. The state government pleaded a jail strike, agitation over the pay commission's recommendations, dacoity and law and order problems and, just ten days before the poll, said that an unspecified number of police personnel had to be urgently re-deployed elsewhere.

A helpless and harassed CEC announced an indefinite postponement of the poll, whereupon the state government expressed surprise and now blandly claimed that this had not been sought. Lie followed lie. The electoral process had been wilfully subverted as Mrs Gandhi simply could not lose, and feared she would not defeat Bahuguna. His victory would have rocked the Congress (I) ministry in Lucknow, and encouraged dissidence in Delhi. It, nonetheless, set in motion fresh efforts to build Opposition unity against a looming tyranny.

*

By 1975, Dr A.Q. Khan had returned home to Pakistan from Holland, armed with pirated designs and reactor components that he had clandestinely accessed and misappropriated while in that country. He shared Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's burning zeal to build a Pakistani nuclear bomb and, by 1981, there was word that this goal could soon be attained and a test with Chinese assistance might be imminent.

This triggered renewed debate on India's nuclear posture and *India*

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Today convened a round table discussion on this. P.C. Lal, retired Chief of Air Staff, Subramanian Swamy and Rajendra Sareen, editor of *Pakistan Opinion Trends* argued the case for the bomb. Major General S.N. Antia (retired), Syed Shahabuddin and I, cautioned against undue haste. I felt there was a significant gap between an explosion that Pakistan might stage and further steps towards developing actual nuclear capability with a delivery system. Even thereafter, in what circumstances would Pakistan use its nuclear capability? To 'liberate' Kashmir? The economic costs to Pakistan apart, I did not think this was a credible scenario.

Three years later, I welcomed Mrs Gandhi's statement that India would not deviate from its policy of not developing nuclear weapons despite renewed reports of an imminent nuclear test by Pakistan, following A.Q. Khan's public claim that Pakistan had acquired uranium enrichment capability. My views underwent a gradual change thereafter, with the unfolding of events in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the development of Pakistan's own ambitions as it pursued its proxy war in J&K. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) campaign, essentially to pressurise India to put its nuclear programme on hold, the West's perfidious turning of a blind eye on Pakistan's plans to develop nuclear weapons and the blackmail underlying Islamabad's Kargil caper, finally confirmed my view that nuclear weapons capability was, sadly, the recognised currency of power for a country like India.

*

After more than five years with voluntary agencies, and with a hostile government making it increasingly difficult for Gandhian institutions to function, I began to feel that it was time to return to mainstream journalism. The opportunity came with an offer from Ramnath Goenka to take over editorship of *The Indian Express*. *The Express* had bounced back after the ordeal it faced during the Emergency when Mrs Gandhi exploited every trick in the book to break Goenka.*

The Express had survived as a result of Goenka's enormous wit and grit and the subtle circumvention of the censors' red pencil by V.K. Narasimhan who had been appointed editor-in-chief when the government sought Mulgaonkar's ouster.

The Emergency over, Ramnathji restored Mulgaonkar to the editor's chair. Ajit Bhattacharjea and Kuldip Nayar remained as two principal aides and were joined as executive editor in 1979 by Arun Shourie, a

*The *Express* story has been told in my biography of Goenka, *Warrior of the Fourth Estate: Ramnath Goenka of the Express* (Delhi: Penguin, 2005).

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World Bank economist turned fiery polemicist, outraged by the Emergency. Shourie interested himself in investigative journalism but friction soon developed between him and the old guard. Sensing that Mulgaonkar was tiring, RNG cast around for a replacement and, by-passing Bhattacharjea and Nayar, took on Nihal Singh from *The Statesman*. Differences arose. Nihal objected to Shourie's role and put in his papers, and RNG sought me out as his successor.

The Express, which I joined on 1 June 1982, had multiple editions scattered throughout the country. It was not the leading paper in any single publication centre, though it boasted a combined circulation larger than that of any of its rivals at the time. Moreover, though RNG was himself a veritable dynamo, he believed in highly personalised control with old retainers to assist him, and the organisation lacked a professional management structure. He was also a poor paymaster, something that did nothing to boost the morale of the staff. But the great attraction of *The Express* was that it was not staid and dared to be different.

Even before I joined the paper, Ramnathji warned me in his presence that Arun Shourie was a 'race horse' that needed to be reined in. I said we were friends and would get on with one another, but was quite surprised when, days before I formally took over, Arun repeatedly urged me to act over his then editor's head, on some matters on which he had been overruled by Nihal Singh, another old friend.

Days after I joined, Arun told me he was working on a big story that he hoped to complete fairly soon. I said I would await it with interest. Several days later, he handed me a series of three articles on what came to be known as the Kuo Oil scandal. Soon after Mrs Gandhi's re-election, the government had contracted, on 20 February 1980, to import a substantial quantity of high speed diesel and kerosene at fixed prices in a falling market, through a Hong Kong company and a 'non petroleum trading' Indian agent. The government later pleaded an 'error of judgment' but evidence pointed to manipulation by the petroleum minister against official advice, on directions from the PMH. The transaction entailed a national loss of between nine and thirteen crore rupees, which was presumed to have been siphoned into certain private/political coffers. The Public Undertakings Committee (PUC) of Parliament was seized of the matter. Now the trick was to delay the discovery of a crucial file that was 'lost' in the PMH, until it was too late for the committee to consider it, before the 30 April deadline for submission of its report to the House.

The story was derived from the 47th Report of the Public Undertakings

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Committee. I had no problem with it but inquired whether the report had been tabled in Parliament. Arun said he did not know. That being so, premature publication of its proceedings would, in my opinion, constitute a breach of privilege. In the circumstances would he like to ascertain the status of the report, or else I could request one of our parliamentary correspondents to do so. Arun thought my intention was to put him down with pettifogging arguments. He curtly said he was 'withdrawing' the article and left the room. I was taken aback by this curious reaction and decided to let him cool off before talking to him again. However, even before I could do so, an extraordinary letter he sent me the following day, copied to RNG, put the fat in the fire.

Arun disagreed with my contention that the immediate publication of his articles would attract privilege. Should one, however, be filed against the paper in order to distract attention from the substantive issues involved in the Kuo Oil deal, it would enable *The Express* 'to well nigh orchestrate the debate', while the controversy would serve as a good advertisement for the paper. He surmised that RNG was weighed down with his own financial and other worries, after a long and exhausting battle to save *The Express* during and after the Emergency, and was now tactically engaged in making overtures to Mrs Gandhi. He had, therefore, influenced me not to publish the Kuo Oil series, but would be temperamentally driven to reverse course the next day, and needed to be saved from his own actions. We should, accordingly, speak out in the public interest, whatever the compulsions of the paper. It would then be Ramnathji's job to keep the paper alive in spite of us. In other words, the editor and his deputy should stage a coup against the proprietor in defence of what we considered his own best interest!

I rang RNG, then in Bombay en route to Ahmedabad, and told him what had transpired, and of Arun's letter, which would be reaching him. I explained my reasons for withholding the three Kuo Oil articles until we knew whether the relevant PUC report had been tabled. It was my first communication with him on this particular topic.

Two days later, I got RNG's response. He was furious and distraught and wished to dismiss Arun, whom he had treated 'as a son', to the annoyance of others. I told Shourie that he had acted improperly and, simultaneously, called RNG to urge restraint as Arun had been impulsive and should be given another chance.

Even as I tried to bring about a reconciliation, things took another turn on 4 July, when I received a copy of identical letters sent by Arun to the two presiding officers of Parliament enclosing his unpublished Kuo Oil articles and endorsing these to some fifty MPs as also to the

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petroleum minister, all on *The Express* letterhead. He argued that parliamentary committees were among the last institutions that could enforce a modicum of executive accountability. Therefore, as a citizen who valued parliamentary institutions and was bound by the Fundamental Duty enshrined in Article 51A of the Constitution, it was his duty to bring the facts regarding this case to the notice of the members of the two Houses, so that they might bring to book those responsible for suppressing material documents from a committee of Parliament. What Shourie forgot was that by using *The Express* letterhead he was conflating his role as a citizen and as an *Express* newspaperman. I told him this was a clear impropriety, but the polemicist turned pamphleteer would not see the difference.

Anyhow, Arun now confirmed that the 47th Report of the PUC had, in fact, been tabled in Parliament as far back as 26 April 1982. Had a simple and timely disclosure of this elementary fact been made when he first submitted his articles, the ensuing contretemps could have been easily avoided. Anyway, with this clarification in hand, *The Express* ran the three Kuo Oil articles, 'The Case of the Missing File', plus a fourth that he had subsequently penned as a sequel. Arun was delighted and thanked me profusely, presenting me with a copy of Irfan Habib's splendid *Atlas of the Mughal Empire*. A mellowed RNG and Shourie also came closer. Arun had just won the Magsaysay Award and I hoped things were on the mend.

Tensions, however, persisted. RNG had written a warm letter of condolence to Mrs Gandhi on Sanjay Gandhi's death. It would have been unseemly to speak ill of the dead, and so Ramnathji had mildly eulogised Sanjay as one who 'flew high, flew fast and finally flew to his death'. As a parent who had himself lost his only son, B.D.Goenka, not so long ago, he had words of sympathy for a fond mother who had been similarly bereaved. He was worried about the political divisions in the country and reckoned that Mrs Gandhi might still provide the necessary leadership, given a willingness to forge a national consensus, if not a national government, at a time of peril. He had given expression to his views in an article in *The Express*. Arun found these and similar 'overtures' suspect.

Another matter that RNG disapproved of was a tendency to exploit the rift that had developed between Mrs Gandhi and her younger daughter-in-law, Sanjay's widow, Maneka Gandhi. Such family tiffs are not uncommon, but are not newsworthy other than in tabloid gossip columns, unless they have a clear bearing on the public interest. RNG mentioned this to me and I had readily concurred. Yet we were

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constrained to comment editorially on the subject, on 23 May 1983, following some strange remarks Mrs Gandhi made about her estranged daughter-in-law, in an interview with an Arab editor. The prime minister alleged that Maneka had been 'planted' in her household, a conspiracy theory she was to elaborate at a meeting of Congress workers in Lucknow, where she invited those who knew how Sanjay Gandhi had been wooed and made to marry Maneka, to speak up.

Since the prime minister had placed a domestic matter in the public domain and invited public intervention, we felt a public response was necessary. We said we found the conspiracy theory utterly bizarre and laughable, and wondered why Mrs Gandhi should invite the nation to take serious note of it. To admit such a theory, we wrote:

> ... would entail adopting the most unflattering assumptions about the state of mind and maturity of almost everybody concerned. What it does painfully reveal is the paranoiac streak in Mrs Gandhi's character which shows up in her accusatory outbursts against the Opposition, the Press, the judiciary and other 'enemies' of the State, which she consciously or indirectly seeks to personify and 'save', and in her periodic references to a foreign hand. The personal tragedy in her household has obviously deeply grieved Mrs Gandhi, as it would any mother. But if this leads to statements or conduct that strains credulity in the high office she holds, then this must be a matter for public concern.

*

A little earlier, the Bihar government had introduced a draconian Press Bill aimed at curbing objectionable writings defined as 'grossly indecent', 'scurrilous' or 'intended for blackmail'. Such legislation was liable to be misused to muzzle the local press, which had been exposing mounting corruption and discontent leading to several mass movements. All this had embarrassed the state government which planned to make offences under the bill non-bailable and, together with a separate amendment, subject to trial by executive magistrates rather than by judicial magistrates functioning under the aegis of the high court.

The bill aroused a storm of protest, and the Editor's Guild sent to Bihar a three-member team, including Shourie, to talk to the chief minister, Jagannath Mishra, and all concerned and report its findings. Even as the delegation returned and sat down to write its report, Arun produced a long article based on the visit, devoting much space, among

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other things, to the large number of rings the chief minister habitually wore. I said that it would be logical to carry the report of the Guild first. I assured him that *The Express* would give this due prominence and that he might thereafter make a further critical analysis as required. He was unhappy with this decision. When the Guild's report was formally released to the press for publication, some days later, I was astonished to find that *The Express* had carried Arun's article but had excluded the actual report on the ground that the one subsumed the other.

Matters again appeared to be settling down, but by now *The Express* had become a subject of gossip and a source of in-house leakages. In mid-September, the *Onlooker*, (now defunct), carried 'whispers' titled 'Goenka to sack Shourie?' Soon after, *Surya*, a journal started by Maneka Gandhi after the Emergency, but subsequently taken over by Dr J.K.Jain, an eye surgeon turned politician, carried material in its August and September issues to which RNG took exception. He wrote to *Surya* objecting to the journal having published a certain letter from Arun to me without carrying RNG's reply 'which cleared up all misunderstandings and misgivings in Mr Shourie's mind and ended the matter'. He refuted other comments as gross distortions.

This led Shobha Kilachand (now De), then editor of *Celebrity*, a Bombay monthly, to seek an interview with Ramnathji. On the basis of this, she ran a story 'Goenka vs Shourie: The War Without Victors, the Exposé *The Express* will never run'. In this, there were several critical references to Arun, said to have been made by RNG. When challenged, Goenka said that much of what had been cited was garbled and had been said off the record, a statement denied by Kilachand, who maintained that she had not included anything shared in confidence. Be that as it may, Arun hit the roof over the references to him and, not getting satisfaction from Ramnathji, whom we met jointly, asked what I, as editor, planned to do to protect a member of the staff against aspersions cast on him.

RNG, as chairman of *The Express* had sent a rebuttal to *Celebrity* which, I thought, had closed the matter. I, therefore, took the line that there was no basis for me to intervene in respect of something published in another journal, and that I was not sure what the paper could do in the circumstances. Arun was scornful of the 'meticulous, lawyer's drafting' of my response and with an air of injured innocence said he had no alternative but to rebut the 'charges' himself, though he feared that this might not be the end of the matter.

The parting of the ways had come. A few days later, Shourie was fired by Goenka 'following certain misunderstandings' as he explained.

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Letters to the Editor started coming in and, in order to stop further speculation, he drafted a note addressed 'To Our Readers'. He avoided recrimination and explained that 'the only factor that counted was the need for compatibility between senior editors and organisational norms and discipline'. He concluded with a ringing avowal of policy:

> *The Indian Express* has never looked at its balance sheet before deciding what to speak and profitability had never been its main motive. Its fight against authoritarianism, corruption, social and economic injustice and for democratic rights, which has been its mission, will continue, God willing, with added vigour.

I told Arun I was personally distressed over the turn of events and wished him every success in whatever he now planned to do.

Shourie and Ramnath Goenka had a love-hate relationship that was later to bring them together again in *The Express* after I (and my successor, Suman Dubey), had left. Arun returned as editor, early in 1987. RNG wanted his 'race horse' back, but once again removed Shourie in October 1990, pleading that the 'race horse is breaking my poor tonga'!

Though an outsider and never a journalist in the professional or traditional sense, Arun Shourie did certainly impact journalistic mores and styles in India but, not necessarily, always for the better. He was a stormy petrel, something of a maverick and ever so long-winded, particularly at a time when newsprint was in short supply. In an interview with the short-lived *Facets* magazine that Chanchal Sarkar brought out for a while, he argued that 'the skill lies not in the initial information (story), the first article. The skill is in the follow-up, in actually orchestrating the debate in the relevant forum; whether in the Supreme Court or elsewhere.' He called this 'insurgency journalism'. It was a sad syndrome.

The report of the Second Press Commission under Justice Mathew was published about this time. *The Express* termed it 'a thoroughly illiberal document which, if accepted, would destroy the freedom and independence of the press on specious grounds that are asserted not substantiated'. The commission magnified the chimera of monopoly and concentration and advocated 'de-linking' papers, initially with a circulation in excess of 100,000, from industrial/business ownership beyond a 10 per cent interest; a price-page schedule; and a mandatory news-to-advertisement ratio. The commission appeared to suggest that only impecunious papers without a real reach could be truly free, quite oblivious of the readers' right to know! Fortunately, with public opprobrium greeting the report its findings faded into oblivion.

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A number of other events claimed passing or more lasting attention: the National Union of Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Minorities staged a Delhi March in a bid to activate the Mandal Report that advocated 27 per cent reservation for OBCs. Little happened thereafter, but Mandal was to imprint itself indelibly on the national consciousness, some years later when V.P.Singh brought it centre stage and took steps to implement it.

SAARC was formally launched in 1983 to promote regional cooperation in South Asia, but without a political mandate.

The inauguration of Phase I of the Rajasthan Canal was hailed as a dream come true.

The Assam agitation was resumed after a period of suspension but was now attended with violence.

The Congress again launched the idea of presidential rule that would mandate parliament a full five-year term thereby nullifying the effect of defections. But it declined to extend this principle to the states. Instead, *The Express* advocated a five-point parliament reform programme: the introduction of the German practice of a constructive vote of confidence, which would entail naming an alternative leader in whom the House must repose confidence; the testing of majorities on the floor of the House and not through Raj Bhavan parades; providing as in some European countries that other than the prime minister no parliamentarian shall be a minister; incorporating an automatic anti-defection clause in electoral nomination forms or in the oath of MLAs/MPs; and the adoption of a partial list system with a given percentage of legislators being indirectly elected through proportional representation, to allow the entry of a better slate of candidates and talents to the legislature.

Centralisation of power in a presidential form of government was suspect in view of Mrs Gandhi's renewed tendency to adopt a presidential style even as prime minister. She forgot little and when the Maruti-Suzuki small car prototype was launched in December 1983 with Japanese collaboration, she recalled 'the vilification, falsehood, accusation and allegations' that she and her son had faced. The facts were completely otherwise, and the damning indictment by the Maruti Inquiry Commission, of the fraud committed, had been airily set aside.

There were worrying signs of administrative rot as well, and some senior officers of outstanding merit like P.S. Appu, principal of the Administrative Staff College, A.K. Chatterjee (Bihar), A.V.S. Reddy (Andhra) and S.C. Varma, a former chief secretary, Madhya Pradesh, put in their papers as they refused to be political pawns. Talk of a "committed bureaucracy' had led some officials to adopt collusive or

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corrupt ways. The Madhya Pradesh Officers' Association protested against the decision of the chief minister to permit every MLA to transfer two officials in each department.

The cavalier approach to issues of prime importance was manifest in the manner in which, after sitting on it for thirty months, the government dismissed as 'biased' the report of the high-powered National Police Commission, chaired by Dharam Vira, a former Cabinet Secretary and governor. What irked the political leadership was a reference made by the NPC to certain observations of the Shah Commission that had inquired into the Emergency excesses. These were repudiated as being 'unduly critical' of the political system and 'hardly in keeping with an objective and rational approach to problems'. The NPC deplored the misuse of the intelligence machinery to gather extraneous information regarding political parties and individuals; and the distortion of the role of the police because of pressures from the political executive or others. The commission observed that 'putting down political dissent has become a tacitly accepted objective of the police system' and that 'interference at the operational level has resulted in bypassing supervisory officers, resulting in a breakdown of the system'.

The Express noted that Karnataka's special deputy inspector general of police was asked by Gundu Rao, the then Congress (I) chief minister, to prepare dossiers on all Congress (I) candidates, on the eve of the state elections, in December 1982. The police wireless was later used to instruct certain candidates to file their nominations. As a result of the partisan police-politician nexus, certain individuals were 'fixed' while known criminals received protection. The criminalisation of politics and the politicisation of crime remained unchecked.

As disturbing was the relegation of the report of the National Committee on Backward Areas Development, headed by B. Sivaraman, a former Cabinet Secretary and Planning Commission member. The committee's analysis of the problems of tribal India shed searching light on a particularly disadvantaged segment of Indian society, which *The Express* noted was 'fast becoming a tinder box on account of growing exploitation and alienation'.

The committee regretted that the funds allocated were allowed to lapse for lack of administrative preparedness and a dearth of trained and sympathetic personnel, who were prepared to adopt unconventional approaches appropriate to tribal areas. In fact, many posts lay vacant. Procedures needed to be simplified and cognisance taken of traditions. It was not in the best interests of the tribal people to try to 'modernise' them completely.

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There were several looming dangers: land alienation by grasping contractors, including liquor contractors; indebtedness; and a forest policy unsympathetic to tribal concerns. The tribal people had been pushed into residual homelands in what were remote forests and hills, which were being opened up to mineral and other development. This had brought destabilising outside influences in their wake, without due protection to the fragile tribal economy and culture. It had created deep resentment, and this had begun to manifest itself in angry explosions. Tribal India could not be taken for granted any longer. It had to be dealt with urgently and with understanding. Otherwise, there would be turmoil. The warning was not heeded and a quarter century later the very same recommendations made by the Sivaraman Committee are being regurgitated.

A year later, the Television Software Group headed by Professor P.C. Joshi, recommended autonomy for Doordarshan and, implicitly, for AIR. This was given short shrift.

The Congress, meanwhile, suffered election reverses in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tripura. Ramakrishna Hegde assumed office in Bangalore at the head of a Janata Party government and made the first real effort to breathe life into panchayati raj in Karnataka, and it was soon cited as a model for others.

The 1982, UPSC civil service results registered a significant improvement in the recruitment of SC and ST candidates, with twenty-three of the former and three of the latter qualifying from the general merit list. It was, however, disappointing to find that, on a rough count, only fourteen Muslim candidates had qualified. The community remained largely non-competitive and educationally depressed, with girls and women being even more disadvantaged. It was evident that unless the Muslims in India took to education and moved with the times, the community would clearly find itself unable to compete in the job market. The responsibility for preventing such a disaster rested both with the community and the country.

Delhi hosted the Seventh Non-Aligned Conference in March 1983. During the event, the demure Indian prime minister was caught in an exuberantly fraternal bear-hug by Fidel Castro of Cuba, who handed over the Non-Aligned Movement chair to her.

Soon after, India pressed Nepal to go ahead with the multipurpose Kosi High Dam at Barakshetra. But Nepal was of the view that the Kosi Basin study it had initiated should first be completed so that an optimised basin plan was available for rational decision making.

Far less creditable was India's inability to implement the agreement

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signed by Indira Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman, in 1974, to provide Bangladesh with a tiny access corridor to its enclaves of Agorapota and Dahagram through Tin Bigha in the Cooch Behar area of West Bengal, in lieu of Bangladeshi territories exchanged with India. This gravely undermined its credibility as a reliable partner in the eyes of Dhaka, especially as the original basis for this transaction went as far back as the Nehru-Noon Pact of 1958, prior to Bangladesh's liberation.

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In October 1983, I was invited to visit Pakistan as the guest of the government. I accepted it as the momentum of the Indo-Pakistan dialogue that had commenced some time earlier had slowed down, and this would provide an opportunity to find out why, take soundings and renew contacts. Furthermore, Zia-ul-Haq's new constitutional reforms that offered no more than 'guided democracy', his Islamisation programme, and a resurgent democratic movement merited a closer look.

As usual, the hospitality was lavish. I visited Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and Karachi, and had occasion to interact with political figures, administrators, academics, the media and friends. In Islamabad, Zahur Azhar, a former Cabinet Secretary and president of the St Stephen's College Union, the Criterion, in my first year, invited Agha Shahi, Zia's foreign affairs adviser, and a number of others for a quiet evening at his home, where we had a lively exchange of views.

I was able to interview the Chief Martial Law Administrator, as Zia-ul Haq, was designated. Zia was generous with his time and laid on his very considerable public relations charm. He was firm that the Soviets must withdraw from Afghanistan, the three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan must be enabled to return home, the independence of Afghanistan must be assured, and the Afghan people allowed to determine their own future. He denied the existence or possibility of granting the US any bases for intervening in Afghanistan. (That was to follow.) He said Islamisation was being promoted in order to restore moral values (witness the degeneracy of the West) and for 'practical reasons', though the latter were not explained. The general opinion, however, was that this had been prompted by the need to counter the democratic movement that had begun to gather strength.

On Indo-Pakistan relations Zia was optimistic that momentum would pick up and said that Pakistan had submitted a draft no-war pact while India had responded with a draft treaty of friendship and non-aggression. He did, however, confirm the Indian apprehension that Islamabad's no-

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war offer did not extend to Jammu and Kashmir as this was a 'disputed' area. His approach was to set aside thorny issues for the moment, and build agreement on less prickly matters, such as trade.

He described Mrs Gandhi, with whom he had been in dialogue for three years, as very shrewd, intelligent and experienced. He was, therefore, surprised that she should have recently said something about supporting Pakistan's Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, which amounted to interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. He felt she had either been 'taken for a ride', and manipulated into believing that the military regime was tottering and only required a further push to fall, or that she needed a diversion to rally internal support, in view of growing dissent at home and the possibility of snap elections. I said that Mrs Gandhi had made no such statement but, in response to a question about Abdul Ghaffar Khan, had said something about being in favour of democracy.

I had asked to meet the Punjab governor, Lieutenant General Jilani, when I visited Lahore. Pakistan was still under martial law and I thought I should meet this powerful figure who had, incidentally, been my senior at the Doon School. On my arrival in Lahore from Karachi, I was duly escorted to Government House and up a grand staircase from the forecourt. I was welcomed by an ADC and informed that the governor was awaiting my arrival. As there was a general hubbub in the adjacent room, I said that I could wait as the governor obviously had visitors. The ADC replied that he had the governor's personal instructions to send me in immediately on arrival and, flinging open the door, announced my presence.

Jilani, or Jil, was a somewhat diminutive figure, and I had not seen him for close on forty-five years. My memories of him were as a 'junior' in the awesome presence of a senior prefect, but he cried, 'Hello, George,' and enveloped me in a warm embrace. And there in a circle were as many old Doon School Boys or Doscos as he had been able to summon from every part of Pakistan. Afzal Khan (Affie), Jammy Rahim and Habibur Rehman from Karachi, Aurangzeb Miangul, the Wali of Swat, from Islamabad, Barekarim and Sultan-e-Room from Mardan, Masood Hasan from Lahore, A.V. Caleb, who taught me History and played with Dhyan Chand as a member of the Indian hockey team that won the gold at the Berlin Olympics, Hanif Manoo, Khurshed Marker from Quetta, 'Sam' Moinuddin, our PT and athletics master, and several others. It was a moving and memorable reunion. Politics was forgotten and the gup-shup flowed as plates were filled from a most generous table, and our boyhood past was revisited with redoubled nostalgia.

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How is so-and-so? Do you remember such-and-such . . .? Arre yaar, what is the latest Sikh joke? The afternoon wore on in convivial banter and laughter. I do not know how Jil got all those people together, and who paid for the long air journeys many must have undertaken. Obviously martial law could work wonders!

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Back home, anxieties over the arbitrary exercise of discretionary and residuary powers vested in the Centre were expressed in a series of conclaves convened to foster Opposition unity. The Srinagar meeting, in October 1983, arrived at a consensus to refer certain questions to the Sarkaria Commission that had been appointed to review Centre-state relations in response to the Akalis' Anandpur Sahib Resolution and other demands for greater states' rights. The Srinagar conclave advocated whittling down the Centre's emergency powers, and steps to ensure that governors acted as genuine heads of state and not as agents of the Union. These apprehensions were soon put to test.

Worried over consultations to forge Opposition unity, to which Farooq Abdullah was a party, Mrs Gandhi felt she must strike to abort 'conspiracies' that might threaten her position. But her major grudge was an incident in Srinagar, when a man in the crowd at an election rally addressed by her at Iqbal Park allegedly turned around and bared his bottom, an indecency for which she held Farooq responsible, though the governor, her cousin, B.K. Nehru, found this charge lacked any shred of evidence.

With Sheikh Abdullah keeping poor health, the prime minister was determined that Gul (G.M.) Shah, the Sheikh's estranged son-in-law, should succeed him. But when Farooq became chief minister on the Sheikh's demise, Mrs Gandhi was annoyed and immediately set to work on the governor to get rid of him by any means. A campaign of vilification was orchestrated against Farooq, who was dubbed a secessionist and communalist, charges that none believed. A Congress delegation including some junior Union ministers waited on President Zail Singh to seek Farooq's dismissal. This was clearly improper. B.K. Nehru was aghast at the devious plans canvassed in Delhi, and refused to do anything underhand. He was brazenly reviled by Congressmen for his principled stance and, after months of stonewalling, was summarily transferred to Gujarat as governor, in April 1984.*

*The sordid story was later narrated in graphic detail by B.K. Nehru in his memoirs, *Nice Guys Finish Second* (Delhi: Viking, 1997).

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Jagmohan, was named governor and Farooq was shabbily dismissed in a palace coup on 2 July. Gul Shah was sworn in with the support of thirteen MLAs. Once in office, the new chief minister soon manufactured a shaky majority. The White Paper issued by the new J&K government was puerile, and in attributing Farooq's dismissal to his 'patronising attitude' towards pro-Pakistan, pro-Khalistan and other anti-national elements, contradicted the grounds the governor had earlier proffered. Kashmiri opinion was outraged; curfew prevailed, off and on, for months and secessionist sentiments grew. The ministry did not last long. Gul Shah was dismissed and Governor's Rule had to be imposed. India was to pay a heavy price for this act of vindictive folly.

I wrote a stinging piece in *The Express* on these sordid developments, in response to which the J&K governor, Jagmohan, responded through a personal letter explaining the factors underlying his action. This was unconvincing and I said so in a detailed private communication, citing previous Raj Bhavan 'coups' elsewhere, each establishing a dubious precedent.

In Andhra, defections from N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Party were encouraged and the government toppled. The governor, Ram Lal, arbitrarily swore in what was demonstrably a minority government under Bhaskara Rao, but ran up against huge popular opposition. Within days, NTR demonstrated his majority at a Rashtrapati Bhavan parade, which he felt was his only recourse in the circumstances. Bhaskara Rao was given thirty days to prove his majority, but backed down, leaving the field clear for NTR to return to office in triumph. Every dirty trick had been employed to break the TDP ranks and stitch together a majority with Congress (I) support, with a Union Cabinet minister camping in Hyderabad. Mrs Gandhi dismissed the episode as the fallout of a party split. It was, in fact, a failed coup.

The Opposition, in turn, was utterly irresponsible in questioning the appointment of Lieutenant General A.S. Vaidya as the next Chief of Army Staff, in supersession of Lieutenant General S.K. Sinha on the ground that the government wanted a partisan and pliable general who might intervene politically on behalf of the ruling party 'either during or after the elections'. This was a slur on a distinguished officer, who was later assassinated (after retirement) by suspected Khalistani agents for the Army's role in Operation Blue Star, a sad and sorry episode in the unfolding Punjab saga.

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Sri Lanka had been troubled for some time and was increasingly riven with ethnic division as the minority Tamils, inhabiting the northern and

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western parts of the island, felt discriminated against. Their long-standing demand for a federal solution had, unfortunately, fallen on deaf ears as the Sinhalas felt that this could well be a stepping stone to separation and independence. As moderate elements were cast aside, the argument grew shriller, and rising Tamil nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism became increasingly locked in confrontation.

Sympathies in Tamil Nadu were understandably with the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka, not merely because of its obvious legitimacy but in view of the ties between the two, and the presence in Lanka of a considerable body of Indian Tamils who had migrated there decades earlier as plantation workers. Many were still Indian nationals. A process of granting citizenship to them had commenced and, while quite a few had acquired citizenship others were repatriated, leaving a residual number in the category of 'stateless persons'. The so-called 'Indian Tamils' were largely located in the central highlands and owed allegiance to the Tamil Workers Congress under the leadership of S. Thondaman. They were not directly involved in the fight for Tamil rights. But ties of culture and kinship endured.

Ethnic polarisation commenced around 1977 when a frustrated Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the most moderate among the Tamil groups, began to talk of a separate homeland, Eelam. This, subsequently, was to lead to radicalisation and violence.

The long reign of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) under the Bandaranaikes was ended by electoral defeat in 1977. The victorious United National Party (UNP) led by J.R. Jayawardene advocated district devolution. A minor incident was, however, to trigger major ethnic riots in Jaffna. One thing led to another. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) edged out the more moderate Tamil groups and was soon proscribed for resorting to revolutionary violence. The burning down of the famous Jaffna Library in 1981 aggravated matters. Attitudes hardened and there began a slow, sure drift towards the unravelling of a Greek tragedy. India communicated its concern to Colombo.

Meanwhile, with approaching general elections in India, a weakened Mrs Gandhi started casting around for allies to buttress the Congress. With growing unease in Tamil Nadu over developments in Sri Lanka articulated by the chief minister, M.G. Ramachandran, she sensed an opening. Using the opportunity of a visit to the Kalpakkam nuclear facility, she announced that MGR 'appreciated' the stance of her government. Until then, a clear line had been drawn between emotional responses in Tamil Nadu to events across the Palk Straits, and the conduct of foreign policy by Delhi. The distinction now began to blur.

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Sri Lanka was alarmed by this seeming shift and the majority Sinhala community began increasingly to exhibit a minority complex, with the weight of its giant Tamil neighbour bearing down on it.

Matters took another turn for the worse when, on 23 July 1983, thirteen Sri Lankan military personnel were gunned down in an LTTE ambush. This was the signal for widespread and prolonged anti-Tamil rioting, which left over 380 dead, officially. The riots also took a somewhat anti-India turn and some Indian plantation Tamils were attacked.

The Indian foreign minister, Narasimha Rao, rushed to Colombo and an Indian vessel was dispatched to evacuate west coast Tamils to Jaffna. MGR formally called for a bandh in Tamil Nadu 'to mourn the events in Sri Lanka', while the Opposition leader, Karunanidhi, demanded that India 'act' or seek UN intervention. All this at a time when LTTE extremists had begun to find sanctuary in Tamil Nadu where they soon imported arms, trained their cadres and virtually took over parts of the Coromandel coast, to the consternation of the local police and district authorities.

Dialogue was restored with Jayawardene expressing willingness to meet Mrs Gandhi's emissary, G. Parthasarathi, who worked out a basis for de facto federalism within a unitary state. Matters of language, university admissions and new settlements in the Mahaweli irrigation command area across ethnic borderlands were also touched upon, and the idea of a federally-administered Trincomalee port mooted.

The skeletal formula, further refined after JR visited Delhi, made the province rather than the district the unit of devolution, and envisaged the merger of the northern and eastern provinces. The formula was now to be put by Parthasarathi to the TULF, which had taken refuge in India, and its response communicated to JR.

The TULF leader, Amrithalingam, was positive and JR expressed his readiness to move forward, though unwilling to accept the merger of any emerging northern and eastern regional councils to form a single Tamil majority north-eastern province. He placed the matter before an All-Party Conference and a measure of consensus was achieved, including a decision to grant citizenship to 94,000 stateless persons of Indian origin. But one wound remained—India's complicity in the arming and training of LTTE cadres in Tamil Nadu, a rash and dangerous adventure that compelled Sri Lanka to shop for arms in Pakistan and Israel, adding to tensions across the Palk Straits.

The shabby Indian pretence that there were no LTTE training camps in Tamil Nadu was rudely blown up in August 1984, with the bombing

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of an Air Lanka airliner at Meenambakkam airport, in Madras, that took a toll of innocent Sri Lankan and Indian lives. This was followed by a press statement, openly issued by the Tigers in Madras, stating that they had stepped up their guerrilla attacks in northern Sri Lanka. This reckless policy, at a time when India was protesting against Pakistani aid to Khalistani terror in Punjab, was thoroughly reprehensible. It introduced the gun culture to the south and this, ultimately, took the life of a young Indian prime minister and watered the roots of Tamil chauvinism. And all for some paltry votes at the cost of principle.

*

Meanwhile, big trouble was brewing in Punjab, again propelled at least in part by the mishandling of the situation by the government, which put divisive politics and electoral gain before the national interest. The roots went back to the promise given to the Akalis by the Congress that despite Partition, the Sikhs would, in Nehru's phrase, find the 'glow of freedom' in independent India. Two unwise policies aggravated Akali bitterness. The first, unspoken, was the official policy of not locating any major public sector industrial units in Punjab, or anywhere near the international boundary, in order to keep such assets out of harm's way in case of a war with Pakistan. This relates to a major failure in fashioning a border policy of trans-boundary relations, as opposed to just drawing or defending a boundary in India's north-west and north-east. This has ill served the country and has in fact bred alienation and a sense of neglect that is only now beginning to be repaired.

The second was the refusal to concede a Punjabi suba at the time of the reorganisation of states and thereafter, for fear that this would entail conceding a Sikh state. At that point, there was no warrant for this communal assumption that was partly driven by Hindu sentiment in urban Punjab. Many Hindus soon began to disown their habitual language, Punjabi, and the Urdu script in which it was commonly written, and what was essentially a linguistic demand gradually assumed communal overtones.

The Punjabi suba was conceded late and with ill grace, with Chandigarh and Abohar-Fazilka becoming hostage to communal politics. The Akalis too contributed towards giving the politics of the state a communal tinge by asserting Sikh rights and holding out threats to followers of the Nirankari mission.

The radicalisation of Sikh-SGPC politics was manifested in the passage of the Anandpur Sahib resolution in 1973, demanding an enhancement

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of the state's rights. Seeking to offset this, and as a by-product of the rivalry between Zail Singh, the Union home minister, and Darbara Singh, Punjab's chief minister, in the early 1980s, an obscure sant, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, was built up by Zail Singh and soon grew to become larger than life.

By 1983, the Anandpur Sahib resolution had been reiterated in more extreme terms, seeking the devolution of all powers to the state, other than for defence, foreign affairs and communications and a number of religious demands were also made. These were referred to the Sarkaria Commission that was already looking into Centre-state relations. Other demands, such as renaming the Amritsar-Delhi Flying Mail the Golden Temple Express, declaring Amritsar a 'holy city', authorising Sikhs to carry kirpans on domestic flights, the enactment of an All-India Gurdwara Act and the broadcasting of the gurbani from the Golden Temple, were given sympathetic consideration.

Yet, the Dal Khalsa and its mentors among the Sikh diaspora abroad, began to describe Sikhs as a *quam*, variously interpreted as a community or nation, and elements of separatism were grafted on to it, with the demand for Khalistan. Matters were not helped by the rise of a Punjab Hindu Sanghatan to counter Sikh militancy. Haryana was pumped to resist 'concessions' to Punjab and to search trains carrying Sikhs from Punjab to Delhi to witness the Asian Games, which the Akali dharma yudh was committed to disrupt.

In April 1983, A.S. Atwal, deputy inspector general of police, was gunned down as he emerged from the Golden Temple after offering prayers. That brutal assault would have justified police entry into the holy precincts to rid it of armed intruders who had entered and begun to fortify it. Darbara Singh was ready to act; Zail Singh stalled him. The government blinked, encouraging further acts of defiance. October saw bomb blasts in Delhi. Khalistani terror, aided and abetted from across the border, had assumed a new dimension. The media was intimidated (*The Express* Amritsar reporter, Sanjeev Gaur, was stabbed and Lala Jagat Narain, chairman of the Hind Samachar Group had been killed). There was rampant lawlessness. The cold-blooded murder of six Hindu passengers pulled out of a Simla-Delhi bus was a signal for Zail Singh to force Darbara Singh's dismissal.

Weeks later, Rajiv Gandhi, now general secretary of the Congress Party, described Bhindranwale as a 'religious leader', while Mrs Gandhi was busy trying to topple governments in J&K and Andhra, and mollycoddling the LTTE. The Akalis kept mounting new morchas, including one to amend Article 25 of the Constitution that brackets

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Sikhs with Hindus for certain purposes. Efforts at dialogue proved abortive. As terrorist killings rose, the All-India Sikh Students Federation was banned. All of Punjab was declared 'dangerously disturbed' under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Terrorists continued staging regular gun battles with security forces from the sanctuary of privileged precincts. The situation was becoming untenable.

The government had to act or abdicate. Act it did. On 5 June 1984, the Golden Temple was stormed and cleared, but only after a stiff battle to overcome well-entrenched and well-directed miscreants who had spent months converting it into a veritable bastion. Intelligence was lacking, or the Army had underestimated the task. In the event, the operation did not proceed like clockwork. The temple was moderately scarred, the Akal Takht destroyed. The nation was in shock; Sikhs were traumatised. Bhindranwale lay dead.

The home ministry's paper, 'The Army action at the Golden Temple' issued ten days later was a damning indictment of the Union government and President's Rule in Punjab. It admitted that the terrorists 'had all but made the (state) administration ineffective'. But when did this realisation dawn? A 'neighbour' and another foreign power were blamed. Zail Singh, who had become President of India by then, and had long presided over the looming catastrophe in various capacities, was appalled by the enormity of the event. He was excommunicated by the Akal Takht, and later begged forgiveness at the Golden Temple, as a humble and deeply religious Sikh. In a broadcast to the nation he fixed responsibility on 'those in charge' of the Punjab administration. A White Paper on Punjab that was issued a month later described Bhindranwale as the centre of mounting terror, incipient separatism and emerging insurgency. *The Express* editorially encapsulated the rest:

> The White Paper states that the Golden Temple had become a centre of criminal and anti-national activity and a veritable fortress replete with sophisticated defences manned by trained personnel under expert guidance. It accuses the SPGC and Akali Dal of supine complicity ... From January 1 to June 3, 1984 there were over 525 violent incidents in which 298 persons were killed and more than 525 injured. There were murders and torture within the Golden Temple complex in defiance of the law. There was an escalation of violence whenever there seemed to be some prospect of settlement and new demands and new morchas kept being announced periodically, thus raising the ante. It is the Government's conclusion that a small group was

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using terrorism to promote 'a secessionist movement based on communal separation'. The Akali Dal and SGPC surrendered to forces of 'religious fanaticism and fundamentalism'. In collaboration with international forces, India and Punjab had become targets for subversion. The stakes were higher than the demands made and the ultimate objective seemed to be to destroy secularism, 'the basic foundation of India's unity and diversity', through communal killings and full-scale insurgency, with the active encouragement and support of various overseas Sikh groups pledged to Khalistan . . .

The action in Punjab was not against the Sikhs but against terrorism . . . There is obvious need for a political settlement, but this, the White Paper states, cannot be on the basis of the Anandpur Sahib resolution(s) which are 'at total variance with the basic concept of the unity and integrity of the nation . . . and cannot be accepted even as a basis for discussion'.

Ramnath Goenka, like some others, welcomed Blue Star as a sad but overdue action against those who would tear the nation apart. But he was unnerved by reports of a mutiny at the Sikh regimental centre in Ranchi, with some young recruits marching on the capital. He telephoned me from Bombay to seek my assessment of the situation and then, surprisingly, remarked that he had spoken to Girilal Jain, editor of *The Times of India* in Delhi too, and that Giri had said that if *The Express* blacked out the news, *The Times* would do likewise. I was flabbergasted and ridiculed any such folly. It would gravely injure the credibility of the paper and give room for all manner of rumours that would be greatly damaging. I said we would take care of the language and presentation so as to avoid any kind of sensationalism. And that is what we did.

Conscious of the extreme delicacy of the situation, *The Express* argued that there was no victory or defeat in this dreadful encounter. India had suffered and the task ahead must be to apply a healing touch after the removal of a cancer by a quick surgical operation. Excesses had been alleged, but nothing was wantonly done and senior Sikh officers were involved in the strike. Even as Operation Woodrose was mounted to flush militants out of gurdwaras and other hide-outs in the countryside, we said the first priority must be to lift the curfew and movement restrictions on the media so that the free flow of information was restored and people got to know the truth, whatever that might be. The Army must forthwith be withdrawn from the Golden Temple and the

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repair and restoration of the Akal Takht and other buildings within the complex should be left to the temple authorities (who could organise this through kar seva or voluntary service), and with an offer of government assistance. Mrs Gandhi visited the Golden Temple, days later, to pay obeisance.

The denouement was near. The prime minister had been advised to change her Sikh bodyguards as a matter of abundant caution, but she brushed this aside as unwarranted. On 31 October, she was tragically felled by a fusillade of shots fired by two of her Sikh bodyguards, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh, as she stepped out from her residence into the garden, for a television interview. First reports said she had been seriously injured but the grim truth was soon known, and the news spread like wildfire. The nation recoiled in shock and horror. *The Express* editorial, 'Indira and India' said:

> This is a time for dedication, not anger: dedication to the democratic way of life, to national unity and to the common resolve to build a better India. The crime was committed by some mindless individuals and not the community to which they belong(ed). Insensate violence in Punjab and elsewhere are utterly wrong and futile. This terrible blood price must shock and shame the country in restoring the primacy of right means for the attainment of right ends. Meanwhile, there must be calm and restraint and no thought of private revenge and retaliation anywhere. That would be a signal for confusion and chaos. The rioting and attack on Sikhs by hotheads and agents provocateurs reported from certain areas must be dealt with sternly and swiftly put down. The head priests at Amritsar, Akali spokesmen and other leading Sikh personalities have joined all others in strongly condemning the outrage. Indira Gandhi herself was a woman of great courage and anything less than a sober and mature reaction would be no tribute to her. The murderers and those behind them must of course be pursued and brought to justice. This must be by due process of law aided, in this instance, by a commission of inquiry.
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> A chapter or even an era in the country's chequered history is ending. Yet it is extraordinarily sad that it should end this way—in blood. An anguished nation will remember Indira Gandhi as one who led the country to great heights, saw a great

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vision and created opportunities for its realisation but then, somehow, never got to stay the course; fell and rose again. She was loved, feared and hated in turn. She had many admirable qualities and her share of political frailties, largely products of her deep insecurity and sense of mission that she felt was being thwarted by malign forces within the country and a foreign hand. History will record her achievements and foibles and draw the balance sheet. We are too near the event.

Our warning was not heeded. Even as the shadows fell that fateful evening, and the crowds swelled at Teen Murti House to pay homage to Indira Gandhi, one could hear the ominous chant, '*Khoon ka badla khoon!*' (blood for blood). The knives were out. The few attacks on and killings of Sikhs reported that evening were only a frightening foretaste of the frenzied orgy of blood and brutality that followed.

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ACCORDS AND DISCORDS

Mrs Gandhi had fallen to an assassin's bullet in the garden of her residence around 9.15 a.m. on 31 October 1984. Rajiv Gandhi was away in Contai in West Bengal on a pre-election tour when he was informed. A helicopter ferried him to Calcutta from where a special IAF aircraft flew him to Delhi. Pranab Mukherjee and Narasimha Rao, ranking ministers, and other key players were out of town, as also the President, Zail Singh, who was on a state visit to Yemen. They all hurried back, anguished and anxious like the rest of the nation.

Rajiv went straight from Palam airport to the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) where Mrs Gandhi had been immediately removed by Sonia Gandhi and R.K. Dhawan. He had not been told of his mother's condition, but had learnt the worst from the BBC on the flight, as AIR did not make the announcement until the early afternoon. Zail Singh landed at Palam some time after Rajiv and drove straight to AIIMS, where he met Rajiv and some senior political figures who had, by then, gathered there. Although a consensus was emerging that Rajiv Gandhi should succeed his mother, the President had already decided that there should not be any interim appointment as caretaker, and that Rajiv would be a suitable and acceptable choice and must be immediately sworn in. He, therefore, requested Rajiv to meet him at Rashtrapati Bhavan, where he gave him the mandate to form a government and, shortly thereafter, swore him in around 7 p.m.

Rajiv Gandhi came to office as India's sixth prime minister, at forty, with virtually no administrative and little parliamentary experience. An alumnus of the Doon School, he had read mechanical engineering at

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Cambridge and had been a senior pilot with Indian Airlines. It was when his high-flying younger brother, Sanjay, was killed in 1980 that this somewhat shy and quiet man, who had remained in the background, was called upon to support his distraught mother. He did not join politics until many months later, when he contested and won a by-election from Amethi to occupy what had been his brother's seat, and entered Parliament. He filled Sanjay's place as his mother's aide and confidant, and was appointed a general secretary of the Congress (I) in February 1983. He belonged to what was effectively a post-Independence generation and was seen as a harbinger of change and a moderniser, given his technological and managerial bent.

The first order of business should have been to stop the ugly pogrom against the Sikhs. But there was little preparedness to counter the mayhem that followed, given that even the President's motorcade had been stoned en route to AIIMS, earlier in the evening. Instead of being at their action stations, many senior Congress leaders seemed more anxious to be seen and photographed at Teen Murti House, where Mrs Gandhi's embalmed body had been laid out for state mourning. Maybe, some were trapped inside by surging crowds and could not move as a Greek tragedy unfolded in the city.

We were appalled, and *The Express* urged a stop to the violence and lawlessness:

> Yesterday we mourned for Indira Gandhi. Today we mourn for India ... Rampaging mobs have been indulging in an orgy of violence, aimed against Sikhs in Delhi and several other cities in a number of states ... Indira Gandhi's assassins were not representative of any community and taking revenge against Sikhs is unpardonable folly ... The machinery of law and order totally collapsed in the capital with mobsters and looters enjoying virtually a free run of the city while the police stood by helplessly. The Army, already on alert, was tardily summoned to the aid of civil authority. There was no curfew until evening, only the most trivial use of force and lack of command and a strategy for dealing with an extremely delicate and dangerous situation.

The administrative breakdown was total and complete. The marauding hooligans had done the crudest violence to the memory of Indira Gandhi and played into the hands of the Punjab extremists and others who wished to see India bleed. We followed up the next day with an editorial captioned 'Cry Beloved Country':

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> Not since the Partition riots has the spirit of India been so violated and defiled as by the madness that has seized certain parts of the country, especially Delhi, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, UP and parts of Haryana ... It is for citizens to come forward to defend the nation against these terrible self-inflicted wounds. Fortunately there is evidence of this in several colonies and mohallas in the capital and, no doubt, elsewhere, with local communities getting together to form their own peace and security brigades and ensure against lynching and vandalism. This is ultimately more important than shoot-at-sight orders, imperative as these are at present, for the hearts and minds of people have to be turned away from hatred and anger ...
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> There has to be a massive upsurge of public opinion against the ugly resurgence of communal venom that could divide the nation. The toll has been fearful and the brutality extreme ... The guilty have in almost all cases got away for lack of decisive police action on the basis of coordinated central direction. Who is pulling the punches and why? This is an extraordinary dereliction of duty on the part of the Central Government and the Delhi Administration ... Rumours have been rife and have added to the panic. It is in this context a matter of questionable wisdom for the Chandigarh authorities to have clamped down a pre-censorship order on the local press which serves all of north-western India and remains the only credible means of disseminating information ... Tomorrow cannot be sacrificed for yesterday. The danger of wider civil strife must be averted at all cost.

Indira Gandhi was laid to rest on 3 November, by when mob fury had been curbed. With the immediate period of mourning behind him, Rajiv addressed a public rally on the lawns of the Central Vista but did little justice to himself or the terrible blow the nation had suffered by stating that 'the earth trembles when a big tree falls'. This was not said in extenuation of what had happened, but sounded the wrong note at a time when people expected firm action.

He made up for this lapse some weeks later when, as prime minister, he appended his signature along with those of several Opposition leaders to a statement appealing for national unity and an end to communal violence. He also recalled Indira Gandhi's words, 'Do not shed blood. Shed hatred'. The major tasks ahead were to provide relief and rehabilitation to the traumatised victims, institute an inquiry and

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bring to justice the perpetrators of the crimes committed (including leading members of the Delhi Congress), act against those guilty of dereliction of duty, and move purposefully to resolve the Punjab tangle.

People in Delhi rallied spontaneously to the cause and did yeoman service through NGOs, resident welfare associations and ad hoc organisations such as the Nagrik Ekta Manch in collecting funds, locating missing persons, delivering relief and medical supplies, noting the names and addresses of witnesses and collating information about damage and losses as a basis for enabling victims to claim compensation. Above all, they provided a healing touch. The media turned the spotlight on the many acts of omission and commission that converted a crisis into a disaster.

With Ramnath Goenka's consent I constituted a high-powered Express Relief Committee with L.P. Singh, Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh, Nirmal Mukharji, K.F. Rustomji, P.R. Rajgopal and some others on board. We raised over Rs 1,700,000 through donations and appeals and worked to reconstruct a considerable number of torched dwellings at Khichripur, Trilokpuri, Palam Village and some other sites.

Editorially, we kept hammering away for unity, justice and reconciliation, and won the confidence of the Sikh community by speaking up for them, when they were otherwise filled with a sense of collective loneliness and despair. Touching evidence of this came to me in the form of a personal letter from a young Sikh student of Delhi's Lady Irwin College. She had been preparing for her final Board examinations at school, and was bewildered and distraught by Operation Blue Star and the riots that followed Mrs Gandhi's assassination. She had many fine and caring Hindu friends and could not understand what had gone wrong and why. She had spoken to her parents who advised her to read *The Indian Express* editorials. She said that by doing so she had found some of the understanding, reassurance and solace she was so desperately seeking, and thanked the paper for making her whole 'and Indian' again. It was a deeply moving and humbling tribute from an unknown girl who had been lost but had found her way again.

I replied:

> I am delighted to know that you have found peace of mind and, once again, face life with pride and confidence and without bitterness, as a Sikh and as an Indian. Bravo. It is when things are difficult and all is dark that we are tested. I do not know how you fared in your Board examinations. But you have earned a distinction in facing up to the world and seeing

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beyond its ugliness and wounds to the beauty, friendship and warmth that exists too—if only we look for it, reach for it and communicate this to others who cannot see.

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The presence of General Zia-ul-Haq at Mrs Gandhi's funeral was a gesture that helped disperse gathering clouds over Indo-Pakistan relations following the hijacking, in August 1984, of an IAC airliner, the second in two months.

Peace in Punjab, perhaps, was a more urgent concern. The post-assassination riots in Delhi and elsewhere had occurred while the state was beset with various crises. And, with Akali rivalries and Khalistani elements aggravating a delicate situation, we urged the release of Sant Longowal and Badal, senior Akali leaders, so as to facilitate informal dialogue pending more formal talks.

An inquiry into the Delhi riots was jointly conducted by the People's Union for Civil Liberties and the People's Union for Democratic Rights. Its report, titled 'Who Are the Guilty?' was published within the month. This faulted the government for inaction and callousness with regard to relief and rehabilitation, and pointed to the 'dubious' role of certain ruling party politicians.

The Delhi riots also showed changing patterns, with lumpen elements ready to exploit any 'cause', and resort to looting and arson. Slumlords too were not beyond instigating mobs to 'create' and grab real estate, by feeding on the frustration of those migrating from impoverished rural areas to city margins, posing new problems of urbanisation, employment and regional planning.

A more comprehensive inquiry was conducted by a Citizen's Justice Commission headed by former Chief Justice S.M. Sikri and some highly respected retired civil servants as members. It asked why an inquiry had not been ordered even by mid-January 1985, in respect of what was the worst carnage witnessed in the country since the Partition riots. It called upon the government to identify and prosecute the culprits, some of whom had already been named. The authorities were urged to review the scale of compensation and advised to reorganise the Delhi police to reflect the diversity of the capital's cosmopolitan population. Its main emphasis, however, was on mending 'the grievous hurt to the secular ideal' by rejecting the distorted concept of guilt by association, which made all Sikhs targets of violence.

It took the government until mid-April 1985 to reverse its curious stand that an inquiry into the November riots would reopen old

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wounds, and to appoint a sitting judge of the Supreme Court, Ranganath Misra, to conduct a judicial inquiry. The long delay in making this appointment, the campaign denigrating Sikhs conducted by the Congress during the general elections and subsequent state elections in March 1985, and the fact that many named instigators of the riots were seen walking free, or had even been inducted into office, did not inspire confidence in the Sikh community. An inquiry into the performance of the Delhi police entrusted to Ved Marwah, then commissioner of police, Delhi, was summarily wound up and the papers transferred to the Misra Commission, which later recommended a separate inquiry into the lapses of the police in the capital.

The commission was soon mired in controversy, and its report disappointed those seeking clarity and justice. It concluded that the 'violence was not organised by the Congress (I) Party or any official who matters in the party', flying in the face of common perceptions. It argued that there was organised violence but that this was perpetrated by anti-social elements, and by 'people from the lower ranks of the Congress (I) Party and sympathisers'. Nor did it pursue the statement of the then Delhi District Magistrate, R.S. Sethi, who referred to local political pressure on the police. Though he could not identify the source, he felt 'something had happened to keep them away from their duty'.

After many vicissitudes and judicial pronouncements, H.K.L. Bhagat, Congress (I) MP for East Delhi and one time minister, was arrested, other Congressmen were arraigned, and compensation to the victims was enhanced. Finally, the National Front Government set up a new commission under Justice G.T. Nanavati, in May 2000, to inquire into the Delhi riots. The announcement was received with cynicism. The Nanavati Commission had little to add to Ranganath Misra's finding that the government was not at fault and blame must primarily rest with various official underlings. Some years later, a distraught prime minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, apologised in Parliament on behalf of the nation for the deep wrong done to the Sikhs during the Delhi riots. 'We still do not know the truth,' he confessed.

The government appointed a commission of inquiry into the assassination of Mrs Gandhi, under Justice M.P. Thakkar on 25 November 1984 and announced general elections a day later. The forecast was that the Congress would ride a sympathy wave. There were, however, deep public misgivings over the national advertising campaign launched by the Congress (I), which clearly targeted the Sikhs in relation to Mrs Gandhi's assassination, through scarcely-veiled allusions and illustrations. The Congress (I) manifesto described Mrs Gandhi's assassination as

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part of 'a wider design' to divide and destabilise India. It also wooed the Muslim vote with familiar promises about upholding the minority character of Aligarh University, encouraging Urdu, and non-interference in personal laws.

Rajiv's electoral campaign was disappointing insofar as he stridently denounced the entire Opposition for anti-national, divisive and communal tendencies; and for furthering conspiracies as a tool of foreign powers to destabilise and dismember the country. His references to Punjab and particularly the Anandpur Sahib Resolution were unhelpful. More damaging were his possibly inadvertent efforts to garner the gains of a Hindu backlash, which stoked a new brand of communalism. Fortunately, he gradually moderated his tone.

Rising election costs were another reason for concern, especially after a most unwise amendment to nullify a Supreme Court ruling in the Amarnath Chawla case, which mandated inclusion of all expenses incurred by a candidate's party or friends within his ceiling of election expenditure. This was compounded by another thoughtless amendment barring company donations, which effectively drove this open and accountable source of funding underground to fuel the black economy.

The extension nationwide of voter photo-ID cards, already introduced in Sikkim, was also recommended. The process was initiated but has yet to attain anything like national coverage. The CEC estimated the cost of the first general election of 1952 at Rs 10.5 crores. This had risen to Rs 52 crores for the 1980 poll. State funding in kind (petrol coupons, allocation of paper for printing posters, and free postcards) was widely canvassed. The Voters' Council urged that there should be an audit of party electoral expenditure and advocated the introduction of a partial list system by proportional representation as in Germany.

Meanwhile, on the night of 3 December 1984, there was a leakage of the deadly gas, methyl isocyanate (MIC), at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal. Hundreds perished instantly, many dying in their sleep. More suffered agonising, lingering deaths; tens of thousands were incapacitated or hospitalised, their internal organs damaged; and pregnant women gave birth to babies with severe congenital defects.

Union Carbide's parent company in America initially tried to pass off the disaster as a case of local mishandling. That did not wash, and the company ultimately paid $470 million in compensation, a pittance considering that it was the world's greatest industrial disaster. (The oil giant, Exxon, paid out ten billion dollars a few years later, for an oil spill off the Alaska coast that took no human life, but endangered a small part of the local penguin population.)

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The political class was busy with the ongoing general elections and campaigning took priority over the unfolding Bhopal tragedy. In the event, of the 22,149 death claims filed subsequently, compensation was granted in 14,677 cases. According to Rajkumar Keswani, a local reporter who investigated and first broke the story, the total number of claims filed was 566,786 (probably inflated by bogus applications), but more than 95 per cent of the claimants received no more than Rs 25,000 by way of compensation for their disabilities and medical expenses. Only 1 per cent received Rs 1 lakh or more.

There was a huge storm of protest about this callous disregard of the widespread suffering caused. The victims were poor, illiterate and, initially, unorganised and were unable to counter the high-powered public relations campaign mounted by the Union Carbide lobby. (It was only years later that an association of gas victims was formed to secure justice for the hapless survivors.)

The Madhya Pradesh government set up a commission of inquiry under Justice N.K. Singh to go into the Bhopal gas leak and examine the entire gamut of circumstances leading to the tragedy. This, however, was unceremoniously wound up towards the end of 1985. The gas victims' compensation claims were in the US courts and it was argued that such an inquiry in India would be prejudicial to their interests! The Opposition cried foul and said the chief minister had fallen prey to the Union Carbide lobby. An unprecedented man-made calamity was swept under the carpet. The Centre remained silent.

By the end of December 1984, the election results had been declared. The Congress (I) won a landslide victory with an almost three-fourths majority, the largest margin ever received by any ruling party since Independence. It was unmistakably Rajiv Gandhi's victory, something like a popular coronation that moved him from mere office to power. (Across the border in Pakistan, days earlier, a referendum that had seen the bracketing of Islamisation and Zia-ul-Haq had given the general a 97.71 per cent affirmative vote and a five-year presidential term. Controlled Assembly elections followed in March 1985, under continuing martial law.)

Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet, a cautious blend of new and old, was sworn in on New Year's Eve. Narasimha Rao (who was replaced by S.B. Chavan), was moved from home, where he had not distinguished himself during the riots, to defence; and V.P. Singh was plucked from UP and inducted into finance. The newcomers included Arun Nehru (Rajiv's cousin), K.R. Narayanan, Natwar Singh, Madhavrao Scindia, Margaret Alva and Arun Singh (an old and trusted Doon School friend), who was made a

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parliamentary secretary. Pranab Mukherjee, No. 2 in Mrs Gandhi's Cabinet, was dropped.

Rajiv came to office as Mr Clean, an honest, soft-spoken and courteous person who placed great emphasis on technological and managerial savvy. His priorities included educational reform, overhaul of the administrative system and the public sector, the development of technology, fuller utilisation of idle capacity, and enhanced productivity. His plan to reclaim five million hectares of wasteland annually reflected his environmental concerns. More important was his commitment to a responsive and decentralised administration with results taking precedence over procedures.

Some of these concerns were manifested in a new administrative culture with the introduction of computers in all government offices (marking the beginning of the end of the old steno-typist regime), the establishment of an optic fibre IT Highway, Operation Blackboard, to renovate schools, and the establishment of 'Navodaya' (New) schools with hostels and improved facilities. The subsequent re-launching of panchayati raj, with one-third reservation for women, was a milestone in gender empowerment and democratic decentralisation at the grassroots level. The Anti-Defection Bill was also adopted with great acclaim.

Six technological missions were launched in the fields of literacy, drinking water, oilseeds, dairying, immunisation and satellite connectivity and telecommunications for rural advancement, the last brilliantly pioneered by Sam Pitroda, a non-resident Indian who had made good in the US. Within a few years, low-cost telephone exchanges had been set up. Public call offices began to dot town and country, and Indians animatedly talked to one another, for business and pleasure. This telecommunications revolution was hugely empowering.

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The new government had many problems on its plate. The most urgent was finding a resolution to the Punjab tangle. Quiet feelers were sent out and the response was encouraging. The Akali leaders were in a difficult situation in view of the raw feelings aroused by Operation Blue Star and the Delhi riots, as also the rise of Khalistani terrorism. Sant Harchand Singh Longowal of the Akali Dal had visited Delhi and stated that he sought a solution within the framework of the Indian Constitution. He was, thereupon, invited for talks and, after intensive discussion, the Punjab Accord was signed on 25 July 1985.

The Memorandum of Settlement was a comprehensive document. It

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left Abohar and Fazilka (where Hindi was the dominant language) with Punjab, on the entirely valid ground that they were not contiguous with Haryana. Chandigarh was allotted to Punjab, where it truly belongs, and a commission was set up to award Haryana some compensatory Hindi-speaking areas in Punjab. Additionally, the Centre offered Haryana assistance to build a new capital. The new city could have been developed as a mandi and a counter-magnet to Delhi, and would have been a tremendous boon to that state. But the value of this was somehow not recognised. The sharing of the Ravi-Beas waters was to be decided by a tribunal whose award would be binding. The Anandpur Sahib resolution was to be referred to the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations to the extent that it related to that subject. Various collateral issues were also addressed to allay Sikh apprehensions and grievances. The nation heaved a sigh of relief.

The accord, however, had its critics among radical Sikh elements as manifested in a spate of terrorist killings. A promising young Delhi MP, Lalit Maken, was gunned down in his constituency; another Congress (I) leader was shot dead in Jalandhar. No sooner had elections in Punjab been announced and welcomed by Sant Longowal than this far-sighted and soft-spoken Akali and patriot was brutally assassinated. The mantle of leadership fell on Surjit Singh Barnala, who led the Akalis to victory in a peaceful poll.

The manifestos of the Akalis and Congress had shown some congruence, and the election result was a resounding vindication of the moderates' position on the Punjab Accord, despite rumblings in Haryana. It appeared that Akali politics was beginning to move out of the gurdwara. The accord, however, was soon strained on the territory Punjab was required to hand over to Haryana; and the controversy over the alignment of the proposed Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal (SYL) and the quantum of water Haryana should receive. If Haryana was intransigent on the territorial issue, Punjab was unreasonable on the water issue, which has continued to dog both states to nobody's benefit.

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Assam was also high on Rajiv Gandhi's agenda. True to his word of losing no time in seeking a solution, the government decided to resume contact with the AASU and GSP. The Assam movement leaders had, all along, been willing to absorb the 1951-61 immigrants, and there was no disagreement, in principle, about illicit immigrants after 1971 being disenfranchised, if they had been wrongly enumerated.

The gut issue was the status of the 967,000 or so persons, who had

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entered the country during 1961-71. Tribunals for detecting illegal immigrants had not proved effective and infiltration continued. The dispersal of earlier migrants outside Assam was easier said than done. Commitments made to refugees and displaced persons, many years earlier, could also not be now rescinded without unsettling the entire eastern region. A new approach seemed necessary. Fortunately, accelerated development to generate more employment and linguistic and cultural guarantees under Article 29 of the Constitution posed no problems.

Negotiations made rapid progress and the prime minister had good news for the nation when he addressed it from the ramparts of the Red Fort on 15 August 1985 announcing that an Assam Accord had been signed at 2.45 a.m. that morning, after a night-long session at his residence. Another long and tragic chapter of discord and bloodshed appeared to have ended.

The cut-off date agreed upon was 1 January 1966. Illicit immigrants who were found to have entered the state between that date and March 1971 were to be struck off the rolls and disenfranchised for ten years, a period roughly covering the span of two general elections. Those who had come illegally after 1971 were liable to deportation. The revised electoral rolls already prepared would be further reviewed in respect of nineteen Assembly constituencies from which a large number of objections had been received. The chief minister, Hiteshwar Saikia, had placed his resignation at the disposal of the PM, in view of the earlier troubled poll, and the existing legislature was to be dissolved to mark a fresh start.

Earlier, Rajiv Gandhi had announced further development measures for Assam including a new Central University (later located at Tezpur), and a second Silchar campus for the North-east Hill University, Shillong. The state's oil refinery capacity was to be expanded, and its transport and communication and other infrastructure strengthened so as to accelerate the creation of additional employment opportunities.

Safeguards were envisaged for Assam's culture and language and the protection of tribal interests. The authorities were tasked to minimise, if not altogether prevent, further illegal infiltration. Apart from building a fence along the Bangladesh border (which Dhaka resented) the surest means of detection, it was thought, would be speedily to complete the arrangements to register births, marriages, deaths and property transfers and issue photo-identity cards to all bona fide citizens in Assam. Further, border security would have to be maintained at a high level of efficiency and integrity. The main challenge would, however, be to

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accelerate development not only in Assam but in the entire North-east, to tap its enormous growth potential.

The creation of a United Minorities Front was, however, disturbing as it was opposed to the accord for the wrong reasons. The accord was not aimed at minorities but at foreigners, among whom were illegal Nepalese immigrants as well.

The Assam elections passed off peacefully and resulted in a victory for the anti-foreigner movement. An Asom Gana Parishad ministry was formed under Prafulla Mahanta, the former AASU leader. This provided representation to various religious and ethnic minority groups and raised hopes that it might be the dawn of a new Assam. Things did not quite work out that way. The strong showing of the United Minorities Front was indicative of lingering animosities and fears.

With the Punjab and Assam Accords concluded, Rajiv Gandhi determined on a hat-trick. The Mizo National Front leader, Laldenga, had tired of what he had come to realise was a futile struggle for independence. He was anxious for a settlement and was to have met Mrs Gandhi for discussions, but she was assassinated the day before the appointment. The threads were picked up by G. Parthasarathi, Rajiv Gandhi's policy planning adviser, who came close to reaching an agreement with the Mizo leader after such demands as 'Kashmir status' and Greater Mizoram were dropped.

Rajiv, however, had reservations on two issues. He objected to a blanket amnesty being extended to those guilty of heinous crimes. He was also determined to avoid the kind of impasse created in Nagaland where it had been agreed that no Act of Parliament would apply to the 'land and its resources'. This subsequently resulted in the Nagaland government barring oil exploration by the ONGC. He relented on a third demand that statehood for Mizoram must be conceded, together with a separate high court and university.

The home secretary, R.D. Pradhan, to whom the final negotiations were entrusted after his successful handling of the Assam Accord, clinched the deal, and the Memorandum of Settlement on Mizoram was signed late in the evening of 30 June 1986, hours before Pradhan retired. The Mizo insurgency had ended. As a sequel, Lalthanhawla, the Congress chief minister resigned to make way for Laldenga, a singular example of the Mizo code of *thawmgaihna* or a commitment to honour, morality and sharing. Desertions from his party were later to bring down the Laldenga ministry. Nonetheless, large numbers gathered to pay homage to the man when he passed away in Aizawl in 1990.

Possibly influenced by the Mizo Accord, the Tripura Tribal National

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Volunteers under Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl expressed a desire for talks with the government and finally laid down arms in May 1988. Tripura had long been troubled by the influx of Bengali refugees and migrants that in the span of some decades decisively altered the demographic balance, reducing the tribals to a resentful minority. Some of them had taken to insurgency, but it seemed now that the forces of peace had begun to assert themselves.

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If the accords signalled success at home, relations with the country's neighbours continued to cause concern. The situation in Sri Lanka had deteriorated towards the end of 1984, with an escalation of violence and terror, and guerrilla attacks on police and armed personnel. Emergency regulations had been imposed on north-east Sri Lanka, which was declared a security zone while a hundred-metre band of ocean along the northern coast was designated a prohibited zone to prevent the LTTE from enjoying freedom of the seas.

India was charged with permitting Tamil separatists to operate out of bases in Tamil Nadu. There were also several bloody incidents in Sri Lankan waters, in which Indian fishing vessels were allegedly involved. The prime minister expressed deep concern over the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils of Indian origin and indiscriminate killings by the military, especially in the Jaffna security zone. Even as the Sri Lankan President, J.R. Jayawardene, placed a new set of constitutional proposals before an all-party conference, there was a flurry of acerbic and recriminatory notes and protests across the Palk Straits, with Colombo expressing distress that Rajiv Gandhi had ignored the terrorist factor. The line taken by the prime minster was fraught with the most serious implications as India too was battling infiltration, terrorism and insurgency from foreign sanctuaries.

Soon thereafter, Rajiv Gandhi stated that India did not contemplate military intervention in Sri Lanka, rebutting a suggestion by the moderate TULF leader, A. Amrithalingam, that this should not be ruled out. Delhi did, however, catalyse two meetings in Thimphu between the Sri Lankan government and all shades of Tamil opinion, including the five militant Eelam groups, the LTTE, EPRLF, TELO, EROS and PLOTE. These were adjourned as a result of further violence, including attempts on the life of President Jayawardene and Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's theoretician who was in Madras.

Mounting restiveness among Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin in the central highlands threatened to break bounds as some

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93,000 of these stateless persons awaited the grant of Sri Lankan citizenship under the 1964 Sirimavo-Shastri pact, while 83,000 plantation Tamils who had opted for Indian citizenship awaited repatriation home. Fortunately, this impasse was broken, but tensions remained. In Parliament, agitated members indirectly sought Indian intervention. One AIADMK member asked what he should tell the people of Tamil Nadu, adding significantly, 'We have already lost the (panchayat) elections.' Colombo predictably objected to what it termed unfriendly and biased statements, and again complained of Tamil separatist bases in Tamil Nadu.

Colombo's protestations were not without justification and I expressed my views in an article that appeared in *The Express* in June 1987:

> A whole range of major offences committed by Eelam groups in various parts of Tamil Nadu have gone unpunished. There has been a marked reluctance to file cases, launch prosecutions and take follow-up action even when there has been murder and mayhem. Where offenders have been booked, as in the Madras Airport blast of August 1984 which killed 30 and injured 37, they have jumped bail with impunity. Senior police officers who have sought to deal with lawless elements have been reprimanded and transferred. Public protests notwithstanding, there have been strong political pressures to allow the Eelam militants licence to do what they will. A considerable armoury of surface-to-air missiles, rocket launchers, mortars, grenades and semi-automatic rifles, landmines and (unlicensed) high-powered communications equipment was seized from them in November-December 1986. The crackdown turned into a fiasco with militant leaders going on fast, Madras and Delhi backing down, and hapless police officers being hauled over the coals.

Delhi bridled when Jayawardene made a telling reference to Punjab. I argued that India needed to tell the Tamil militants as much as the Jayawardene government that there could be no military solution.

Rajiv Gandhi showed increasing concern over what he saw as a Sri Lankan attempt to seek a military solution, with a blockade of the Jaffna peninsula giving rise to food and fuel shortages. He responded impetuously, and sent a flotilla of Indian fishing vessels laden with relief material to break the blockade. On this being turned back by the Sri Lankan Navy, the prime minister ordered an airdrop of the supplies by heavy transport aircraft of the IAF, with an escort of Mirage fighters. This demonstration of Indian power sent ripples across South Asia,

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which had just agreed to launch the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), though others saw it as a purely humanitarian gesture.

Fresh negotiations ensued between Colombo and Delhi, which culminated in an Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement that was signed on 29 July 1987. The accord set out a timetable for the cessation of hostilities, the surrender of arms by Tamil militants, the withdrawal of Sri Lankan security forces to pre-May 1987 positions, the release of prisoners, the granting of an amnesty, the lifting of the emergency by 15 August, elections to provincial councils by 31 December, and a referendum in the Eastern province, a year thereafter, to determine by a simple majority whether it wished to continue as a single administrative unit with the Northern province. The Muslim-Sinhala majority district of Amparai, however, was to be detached from the Eastern province. The accord was notable insofar as Colombo formally accepted the federal principle for the first time.

There was a further stipulation that Sri Lanka would not employ foreign military or intelligence personnel, ensure that Trincomalee port was not used in any manner inimical to Indian interests, prohibit foreign broadcast transmissions from its soil, and operate the Trincomalee oil storage depot as an Indo-Sri Lankan facility. In the same spirit, India agreed to deport all Sri Lankan citizens found to be engaging in terrorist activities or espousing separatism.

Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, declared he was not bound by the accord, having only been consulted ex post facto, and described it primarily as an assertion of the supremacy of India's security interests. Members of Jayawardene's own Cabinet, the Buddhist Sangha and others were also not happy with the agreement that had been signed. In fact, when Rajiv Gandhi flew to Colombo for the ceremony, a Sri Lankan sailor swung his rifle to land a glancing blow on him while he was inspecting a guard of honour. The PM was unhurt but understandably shocked.

The gaping flaw in the agreement was that it was negotiated and signed by the governments of Sri Lanka and India, to the exclusion of the Tamils. They were not made parties and were not even invited to witness its signing. It was this ambiguous accord that India was pledged to underwrite and guarantee, by military means if necessary. The 54th Indian Division was deployed in the Northern and Eastern provinces, while two Indian frigates stood by offshore as part of what was to become the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). Here was an opportunity (unfortunately, not grasped), that could have given SAARC a flying

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start had India endeavoured to involve it in the peace-keeping and reconstruction process in Sri Lanka.

The IPKF was soon engaged in military operations against the LTTE. There was a backlash in the southern region of the island as well, with the right-wing Sinhala JVP launching an anti-accord movement that soon lapsed into violence and terror. It was subdued by the Sri Lankan Army, as was the LTTE by the IPKF, but at considerable cost and much embarrassment to India.

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I wrote to Ramnath Goenka stating that I would be fifty-eight on 21 June 1985, and sought retirement from *The Express* as of that date. I wanted to get away from administrative and organisational responsibilities, and catch up with some other writing and activities that interested me.

Ramnathji expressed surprise, though he recalled my having mentioned this when I joined. It is true that the law stipulates fifty-eight as the age of superannuation, he said, 'But our organisation has not followed it as a rule . . . I know your interest in nation-building activities but that does not prevent you from continuing . . . In case your resolve is irrevocable, please suggest what I should do.' I recommended one of my colleagues within the Express Group but Ramnathji persuaded me to stay on for another year to give him time to scout around for a successor of his choice. This he did, and brought in Suman Dubey just before the end of that deadline.

During the period I had been with *The Express*, I had, like Mulgaonkar before me, more than once taken up the question of the future of the group with an ailing RNG. After the untimely death of his son, B.D. Goenka, he had tried out his three grandsons, but felt they needed considerable grooming before any of them would be ready to head the organisation. There were family rivalries too with B.D. Goenka's widow, Saroj, now managing director, anxious to assume the mantle of chairperson.

My suggestion was that RNG should form an independent trust to take over the Express Group during his own lifetime. He asked for names of possible trustees, which I supplied. But then he said that the law provided for a government-appointed public trustee who could assume overriding powers under a vindictive political regime. I thereupon suggested an Editorial Trust and a Management Trust on the model tried out earlier by *The Statesman*. He said such an arrangement was unlikely to work in practice and pointed to the fiasco that followed that experiment.

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I finally suggested that the board of *The Express* be broadened to go beyond family and close friends, with the inclusion of some men and women of high standing and integrity as so-called public interest directors, who would safeguard the editorial independence of the group and lend credibility to its management. He said he was prepared to consider this option but, in fact, did nothing about it, despite warnings from several others too that unless he settled the matter the succession might tear the organisation apart, and cripple what had become a national institution and a flag-bearer of press freedom.

Those forebodings came to pass after the patriarch breathed his last on 5 October 1991. He had adopted his grandson—Vivek Khaitan, now Vivek Goenka—at his hospital bedside, eighteen months earlier. It was not long before the empire split, with Vivek Goenka taking over the western and northern editions and Manoj Sonthalia, another grandson, assuming control over the southern editions which came to be named *The New Indian Express*. Saroj Goenka inherited most of the property. Deep down RNG had come to see *The Express* as an expression of his own personality and could not bear to be parted from it, howsoever symbolically. He was *The Express*.*

RNG was a 'Tamil Marwari' and a man of many parts who had risen to power and eminence in Chennai—a revolutionary, nationalist, Gandhian, Congressman, industrialist, media baron, man of property, parliamentarian, rebel, kingmaker and hyper-litigant. He was generous to a fault and yet as mean as they come, a staunch friend but a dangerous enemy and, above all, an indomitable fighter for the freedom of the press. I got on well with him, ignored his tantrums and enjoyed his affection. He would say of me, 'George is a saint. And saints should be in the Vatican!'

While at *The Express* I had been invited to join the Board of Governors of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), a think-tank established by V.A. Pai Panandiker. Now that I was ending my formal career as a journalist, I spoke to Pai about the possibility of joining the CPR. He warmly welcomed the idea and said that writing on water resources would be very worthwhile. Within a couple of months of quitting *The Express* I was ensconced at the CPR. Among the many farewell letters I received was one from Sharda Prasad who wrote, 'P.N. Dhar used to say of the Prime Minister's Office that it was a place where the immediate seemed to take precedence over the important. A newspaper

*I will not say more of my time at *The Express* here as this is recorded in *Warrior of the Fourth Estate, Ramnath Goenka of the Express* (Delhi: Penguin, 2005).

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is not very different. I hope your assignment with the Centre for Policy Research will give you the time to write on matters close to your heart.' It did.

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Meanwhile, the Congress centenary celebrations in Bombay, in 1985, provided an occasion for Rajiv Gandhi to speak his mind. Addressing the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) as Congress president, he was scathing in describing the party as a feudal oligarchy with power brokers riding on the backs of workers. This had come to pass because it had lost mass contact and drifted away from the people. Instead, it was content with empty slogans and sanctimonious posturing.

Though unsparing in his criticism of the Congress, Rajiv saw no alternative to it. He felt that it was the only national body that could keep the country together. He was vitriolic in his attack on the Opposition parties, accusing them of corruption and of cynically disregarding national security, and even colluding with anti-national elements. This sweeping generalisation without any concrete instance of mala fides was unfair, even slanderous, and could only create a climate of confrontation whereas the 'centenary resolve' talked of building a national consensus on basic issues. He also expressed apprehension at the rise of regionalism, the mixing of religion with politics and the alleged demand for a weak Centre. To regard regional parties as somehow anti-national was unwarranted. It ignored the fact that they reflected the diversity of India, which had still to be adequately recognised and accommodated. He then went on to castigate trade unions, business and industry and the bureaucracy for lack of commitment to national goals and values. But he ignored his party's own contribution towards corrupting these elements in matters of governance.

By and large, the country applauded Mr Clean. Yet it was disappointing that the Lok Pal Bill introduced a few months earlier excluded the prime minister, MPs and chief ministers, all of whom had been within the ambit of the earlier 1968, 1971 and 1977 bills, which had lapsed. Almost the entire Opposition was in favour of the inclusion of the prime minister, but the government was adamant on the plea that the prime minister enjoys a unique position, and to bring the office within the jurisdiction of the Lok Pal could create instability. The argument was widely criticised as specious.

There were changes in the party. Younger men were appointed to head the provincial Congress committees in Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Other changes followed in Delhi in furtherance of the

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principle of one-man-one-post, which eased out some older men, with the aged Kamlapati Tripathi being nominally retained as working president under Rajiv himself. This violated the one-post rule, but was consistent with his stated wish to establish party supremacy over the government, a strange and unworkable principle to enunciate in a parliamentary democracy!

Rajiv Gandhi made his debut in international relations with an informal trip to Moscow followed by formal visits to the US and France, as well as to Egypt and Algeria. Everywhere, he was seen as a new-generation leader—modern, liberal and technologically savvy. He spoke to President Reagan of his apprehensions about the supply to Pakistan of sophisticated arms. He also expressed deep concern over its clandestine uranium enrichment and nuclear weapons programme, a theme to which he was to revert repeatedly, and stated that should Pakistan go nuclear India would be constrained to follow suit. On Afghanistan, he asserted that external (Soviet) intervention and (American) interference must cease in order to facilitate the restoration of that country's non-aligned status.

Back home, Rajiv told the National Defence College that he sought 'not merely détente but an entente (cordiale)' with Pakistan, but referred to the vexing problem of Islamabad's efforts to acquire nuclear capability with financial backing from certain other countries. He again called on the Americans to apply more pressure on Pakistan by withdrawing the Symington Amendment waiver that gave it immunity and precluded the stoppage of US military and economic assistance.

The American response was that they had made known their deep concern to Pakistan, which had not been left in any doubt of adverse consequences, were it to go too far. It also seemed Washington's view that Pakistan's attainment of military-nuclear capability was by no means imminent, and that it could still be headed off, in the interim, through the offer of an appropriate range of modern conventional arms that assured it the security it was seeking, without upsetting the regional balance of power.

We at *The Express* believed that the line being pursued could entail a drift to nuclearisation and urged the government to conclude the incipient no-war pact and treaty of friendship and cooperation with Pakistan. Likewise, whatever its limitations, why not explore Islamabad's offer of mutual inspection of each other's nuclear installations. Or the idea of a South Asia nuclear-weapon-free zone (despite the China factor, if there was no way around that).

Rajiv Gandhi, however, held firm. Even while calling on the

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superpowers to negotiate a nuclear truce leading to nuclear disarmament, he firmly shut the door on any nuclear dialogue with Pakistan, rejecting the five options Zia-ul-Haq had suggested. The Pakistan President spelt out these 'equitable and non-discriminatory proposals' as: simultaneous acceptance by both countries of the NPT or full-scope IAEA safeguards; mutual inspection of each other's nuclear facilities; a joint declaration renouncing the development or acquisition of nuclear weapons; the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in South Asia; and a South Asian meet on peaceful nuclear development.

Rajiv obviously had little confidence in Pakistan's assertions, in view of its record of clandestine development of nuclear capability and the China factor. Indeed, soon thereafter, the Indian Army Chief, General Vaidya, stated that a nuclear test by Pakistan was imminent at a Chinese test-site. Nevertheless, there was a thaw later in the year when Zia visited Delhi, and the two sides announced an agreement not to attack one another's nuclear installations.

A strong votary of global disarmament, Rajiv had hosted a six-nation initiative, soon after assuming office. It brought together in Delhi the heads of government of Sweden, Greece, Argentina, Mexico, Tanzania and India. The Delhi Declaration they drafted called for a complete halt to the production, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Soon thereafter, Rajiv discovered that the views of Mikhail Gorbachev, the new Soviet President, on disarmament, resonated with his own. Building on this, the six nations appealed to Reagan and Gorbachev to carry forward proposals for deep cuts in nuclear arsenals, and effective measures to prevent an arms race in space. They suggested a twelve-month moratorium on nuclear tests, and offered to assist with third-party verification if that would help. Rajiv was pleased when Gorbachev made a bold statement favouring comprehensive nuclear, chemical and conventional arms control in three phases.

Anxious to keep the momentum going, the six-nation group drafted an action plan for a nuclear-weapon-free world. This was presented by Rajiv to the UN General Assembly's third special session on disarmament in June 1988, but fell on stony ground.

There was, however, reason for optimism on another front. In mid-1985, Deng Xiaoping had sent feelers regarding the reopening of consulates in Lhasa, Shanghai, Calcutta and Bombay and the resumption of Indo-Tibet trade as part of an overall design for improved Sino-Indian relations, even as talks on the boundary dispute continued. The Indian response was overly cautious, and Deng's overtures for a summit meeting were stalled. That meeting finally took place in December 1988,

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with a prolonged handshake between Deng and Rajiv (Deng referred to him as 'my young friend'). It marked an upturn in Sino-Indian relations after a long impasse.

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The prime minister had made a good beginning by securing a series of accords and projecting India on the international stage. In addition to this, ISRO's first remote sensing satellite had been successfully launched.

But clouds were also gathering on the horizon. Events in Punjab had taken a communal turn and, after a sample study of thirty-five 'encounter' deaths, the Punjab police and para-military formations were found guilty of 'terrorism and lawlessness'. The Punjab Accord faltered on the Chandigarh and SYL Canal issues. Sikh extremists reoccupied the Golden Temple and tore down the Akal Takht that had been reconstructed by a rival Sikh jathedar with state patronage, while a helpless administration looked on. The Barnala government was dismissed in April 1987 on the eve of the Haryana polls, a sequence that some believed was not entirely coincidental. Finally, the Centre acted to clear the Golden Temple complex, which had by now been fully penetrated by undesirable elements. Operation Black Thunder was brilliantly executed under the direction of the National Security Guard, which operated in the presence of the media, and cleared the precincts with minimal damage or casualties. But the Punjab problem did not go away until after Rajiv's time.

The Gorkhaland agitation in the Darjeeling Hills also led to violence in 1986, as the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) under Subhash Ghisingh clashed with Marxist cadres on issues of cultural identity and territorial autonomy. The proximate cause sometimes cited was the flight or expulsion of some 10,000 Nepalese from Meghalaya, following an anti-outsider agitation, and that compelled them to seek refuge in the Darjeeling Hills. The CPI (M)-controlled tea gardens became a battleground. In 28 months of agitation until August 1988, over 250 lives, including those of 44 security personnel, were lost and much damage done to property. The demand for a separate state was deflected, and a settlement finally reached on the establishment of an autonomous Darjeeling-Gorkha Hills Council, within West Bengal.

Other issues that were to arouse considerable communal passions had also come to the fore. A divorced Muslim wife, Shah Bano had, in 1978, gone to court seeking a monthly maintenance of Rs 500 from her husband. The matter went up to the Supreme Court which, in 1985, ruled in favour of the wife, and went on to state that this was consistent with Shariah law.

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The judgment riled Muslim clerics, who were infuriated by the fact that a secular court had sought to interpret the Holy Quran. The minister of state for home affairs, Arif Mohammad Khan, a young Muslim who belonged to the Congress Party, defended the court's ruling in the Lok Sabha. The Muslim Personal Law Board reacted sharply. The prime minister had second thoughts and, acting on advice not to alienate the Muslim vote, approved the introduction of the Muslim (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, also known as the Muslim Women's Bill. This held that unless both husband and wife agreed that they would be governed by the Criminal Procedure Code, all similar applications by Muslim women for maintenance would be considered under the new legislation, brought forward exclusively for the community.

The clerics were not fully satisfied, but liberal Muslims and other sections of society, especially women, were outraged. Rajiv Gandhi consulted a wide range of people about this. Arun Shourie and I met him jointly and we argued at length against any regressive amendment, but to no avail. Arif Mohammad Khan resigned in disgust, and Rajiv's secular credentials were dented.

A separate judgment, about the same time, opened up another communal front relating to the Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi mandir dispute. The Babri mosque was built by Mir Baqi, a nobleman at Babar's court, in 1528, allegedly on the site of a temple in Ayodhya, commemorating the birthplace of Sri Ram at that very spot. Litigation on this matter dates back to 1885.

In December 1949, the premises of the masjid were broken into and Ram Lalla idols installed inside by stealth, at dead of night. Following an uproar, a magistrate ordered that the structure be locked. Title suits were filed and injunctions, arguments, stays, agitations and protests followed. In February 1986, the district judge at Faizabad, ruling on a petition filed some days earlier by one Umesh Chandra Pandey, held that Hindus could worship within the sanctum sanctorum located under the main dome, whereas previously, worship had been allowed only in the outer courtyard. The inner and outer locks were ordered to be removed forthwith to permit unrestricted darshan and puja. Within forty-five minutes, the order was complied with and was caught on camera by Doodarshan, all of which, critics said, indicated premeditation.

Protests erupted, but the deed was done and fresh litigation and political agitation ensued. It was widely believed that the prime minister had been persuaded to go along with the removal of the locks to assuage Hindu sentiments in order to balance the favour done to the

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other side by the Muslim Women's Bill. Here was vote-bank politics at its crudest, unmindful of the national interest. The fundamentalists had won the day, and secularism took a heavy blow. Rajiv had lost his way.

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Even before this, other things had started going wrong. The prime minister wished to liberalise the economy by relaxing controls, promoting investment and encouraging exports. But among the reform guidelines, the finance minister, V.P. Singh, devoted more attention to cracking down on the sources of black money, like tax evasion, illicit business commissions, money laundering and smuggling.

The prime minister had famously stated that of every rupee allocated for development, only fifteen paise reached the grassroots beneficiaries for whom it was intended. The leakage had to be stopped, and V.P. Singh acted quickly to do so. As a result, within two years some thousands of firms and establishments had been raided, up and down the country, including those of leading industrialists such as S.L. Kirloskar, Dhirubhai Ambani and L.M. Thapar. Some had tendered apologies to get off the hook.

Thapar and Ajitabh Bachchan, both friends of the prime minister, had been investigated after being named in a case involving edible oil supplies to India by a New York firm, Louis Dreyfus. Rajiv was assailed by complaints that business confidence and the investment climate were being adversely affected. Increasingly uneasy, he moved V.P. Singh from finance to defence, which was being run by Arun Singh working under him as minister of state, and took over the finance ministry himself.

The reason given was not that he wished to ease V.P. Singh out of finance, but that defence needed the full-time attention of a Cabinet minister in view of gathering tensions with Pakistan, which called for a gearing up of military preparedness. A crisis had been precipitated by a massive military exercise scripted by the dashing Army Chief, General Sundarji, in the Rajasthan desert in close proximity to the Pakistan border, as part of normal winter manoeuvres. Pakistan should have completed its own military exercises by then, as notified, but had not withdrawn its troops to their normal bases. Each side, alarmed by the possible intentions of the other, ordered fresh deployments, resulting in a confrontation that caused some anxious moments before it was defused. In retrospect the event turned out to be a storm in a teacup, but lack of communication and continuing tensions in the Siachen sector as well did create a scare, until matters were sorted out diplomatically.

Even though V.P. Singh had departed from the finance ministry, he

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had initiated certain actions that put the director of enforcement, Bhure Lal, hot on the trail of various questionable transactions. One of the issues Bhure Lal wished to probe was how Reliance's unlicensed Patalganga petrochemical plant in Maharashtra had been financed. An *Express* exposè by Gurumurthy had uncovered the basic facts. Bhure Lal's investigations now indicated a cover-up with a number of footloose shell companies flitting from the Isle of Man to the Virgin Islands, all tax havens, allegedly fronting for Reliance, and suspected of money laundering.

Seeking the assistance of a detective agency to pursue matters further, Gurumurthy had been directed to an American agency, Fairfax. Finding this unaffordable he suggested that Bhure Lal might like to consider getting in touch with this firm, which the latter did, engaging the agency not for a fee but on the basis of the Government of India's standard reward rules, though without a written contract. Fairfax accordingly approached Du Pont for information on the Patalganga plant it had sold Reliance. It was at this juncture that Bhure Lal was transferred and Du Pont was asked by Delhi to drop the matter. Tongues wagged.

No sooner was V.P. Singh ensconced in the defence ministry on 26 January 1987 than a coded cable from the Indian ambassador in Bonn, also copied to the prime minister, landed on his desk. This stated that the West German government had declined to renegotiate a lower price for a follow-up HDW submarine contract, since a 7 per cent commission had already been paid to an Indian agent. Singh mentioned the matter to the PM at the end of a routine Cabinet meeting, and ordered a departmental inquiry.

The report hit the headlines the next day and there was an uproar in Parliament with demands for a full disclosure, as middlemen had been banned in defence transactions. Rajiv Gandhi was perturbed and quizzed Singh who felt he was being put in the dock, and tendered his resignation. The PM tried to talk Singh out of this but, by then, the Fairfax issue had begun to attract notice and a minister, K.K. Tewary, and another Congress functionary accused Singh of entrusting sensitive inquiries to an American agency. V.P. Singh quit and K.C. Pant was appointed defence minister. The government had egg on its face.

Matters did not improve with a falling out between the prime minister and the President. Zail Singh had virtually selected Rajiv Gandhi to succeed his mother. He felt not only that the young man would do well but also turn to him for guidance. Instead, he found Rajiv had grown cold, avoided him and did not brief him or send him papers even when specifically requested to do so.

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The prime minster, in turn, felt that Zail Singh was interfering in Punjab politics. In his posthumously published memoirs, Zail Singh said that Rajiv Gandhi had contemplated impeaching him, but fearing this might backfire had sought to ease him out through emissaries who suggested that the Punjab situation might improve if he left Rashtrapati Bhavan to become chief minister of the state. These tales had given rise to gossip and speculation.

At this juncture the controversial 'godman', Chandraswami, passed on a message to Ramnath Goenka that the President would like to meet him. Being unwell, Goenka sent Gurumurthy, a close confidant and *The Express*'s financial adviser, to Rashtrapati Bhavan. There, Zail Singh immediately led him out on to the lawns, fearing the mansion had been bugged. (I was to have a similar experience on another occasion.) The President then narrated his tale of woe. The upshot of the conversation was that the President decided to write to the prime minister.

Gurumurthy reported back to Goenka who summoned Mulgaonkar, editorial adviser to *The Express*, and Arun Shourie (now back as editor of *The Express*) to consider the matter, following which Mulgaonkar offered to prepare a draft letter. Meanwhile, a draft was received from Rashtrapati Bhavan which Mulgaonkar 'suitably edited' and sent back. The President toned down some of the language and sent it off to the prime minister.

Unaware that the letter had been thus changed and 'softened', *The Express* published its own edited draft on March 13. Parliament exploded and the Opposition walked out when a motion of privilege against the prime minister was disallowed. The CBI raided *The Express* and Gurumurthy was arrested in Chennai.

This is what Zail Singh wrote to Rajiv Gandhi according to *The Express*:

> I am constrained to say that certain well-established practices (with regard to relations between the President and prime minister) have not been followed . . . After your visit to the USA and stopover at Moscow, and your discussions with these superpowers, though I had requested you . . . to let me know your impressions . . . I was not briefed. I was given no briefing after the SAARC deliberations in Bangalore. In fact, I have not been briefed on foreign policy issues relating to our South Asian neighbours with whom there are outstanding problems . . .
>
> Even on certain important domestic issues, I have not been kept informed on matters relating to Accords finalised in respect of Assam, Punjab and Mizoram. I was not briefed at any stage.

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On the other hand, when I specifically requested you to meet me after my visit to Jammu and Kashmir last year, there was no response from you ...

You have also said in your reply to Parliament that the Opposition is politicising the office of President. In fact the politicisation was started by an Hon'ble Member of the ruling party in April 1985. I had brought it to your attention then that there was an emerging trend to drag the President's office into political controversy ...

I do feel that if relations between the President and the prime minister are to be maintained in line with the letter and spirit of the Constitution, keeping national interest paramount, there will be no room for comment or speculation from any quarter. This delicate relationship has to be nurtured by mutual trust, concern for conventions and an emphatic and free exchange of views.

As you have conveyed your views to Parliament, I felt I should convey to you the factual position on the subject.

The President was more expansive in private conversation. The Hon'ble Member cited in the letter was K.K. Tewary, who had alleged that the President had been harbouring Punjab extremists in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Tewary had subsequently been inducted as a minister, 'perhaps as a reward for his labours'.

The Congress rallied in support of Rajiv Gandhi, but the Opposition saw V.P. Singh as a figure around whom it might regroup. V.P. Singh resigned from the government on 12 April 1987. He was subsequently expelled from the Congress.

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Ill winds continued blowing. The unearthing of a scam involving Balram Jakhar, the agriculture minister, in a shabby fodder purchase deal proved to be an embarrassment.

Far more wounding was a Swedish National Radio broadcast on 16 April 1987 alleging that senior Indian politicians and key defence figures had been paid commissions worth Rs 64 crores on a Rs 1700 crore contract for the supply of 155-mm Bofors howitzers to India, and that another estimated Rs 250 crores had gone into secret Swiss bank accounts as undercover payments, through Win Chadha, a former Bofors' agent in India. Those named included the London-based business house owned by the Hinduja brothers and Ottavio Quattrocchi, the Delhi representative of Snamprogetti, an Italian firm, and a friend of the

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Gandhi family. Bofors was a flagship Swedish company and the gun deal represented the country's largest ever single export order, which had come at a time when the company might otherwise have had to close down. Middlemen had been 'abolished' by Rajiv's government in the case of defence contracts, but were here seen to be busily at work.

Coming after the HDW disclosure, the Bofors scandal was a bombshell. The Indian press avidly followed the story. The government sought Sweden's assistance in establishing the facts, which were soon confirmed by that country's National Audit Board. Parliament cried for blood and demanded that a Joint Parliamentary Committee investigate the matter. A rattled Rajiv Gandhi told a sceptical Lok Sabha, 'I categorically declare in this highest forum of democracy that neither I nor any member of my family has received any consideration in these transactions. That is the truth.'

The JPC report cleared the political class and bureaucracy of any wrongdoing. It attributed the payments made by Bofors to 'winding up charges' outside the deal to clear commitments to its previous agents, once middlemen had been barred, in 1985. A further matter of controversy was why the Bofors gun had been selected against three other bids, when the Indian Army had repeatedly expressed its preference for the French Sofma gun. This was partially stilled by a high military certification of the superior 'shoot and scoot' feature and other qualities of the Bofors howitzer.

Nevertheless, an AIADMK MP provided grist to the critics' mills by calling the JPC report a cover-up. He pointed to the 'extraordinary attention' paid to the matter by the prime minister who had doubled as defence minister at the time. Also noted was Rajiv Gandhi's friendship with Olaf Palme, the Swedish prime minister (since mysteriously killed) who had visited India just before the deal was concluded. A subsequent evaluation by the comptroller and auditor general, T.N. Chaturvedi, was no less critical of the manner in which the Bofors contract had been negotiated.

More damaging than any of these formal proceedings was the tireless probing and revelations by the press, particularly *The Hindu* and later *The Indian Express* and *The Statesman*. The prime investigator was a young Geneva-based Indian journalist, Chitra Subramaniam—Rajiv dismissed her as a mere 'girl reporter'—who tenaciously pursued the trail to Sweden.*

*Chitra Subramaniam's narrative, which later came out as a book, is summarised in an essay 'Sting and Stink in the Tale' that she wrote for a volume I edited, *Breaking the Big Story: Great Moments in Indian Journalism* (Delhi: Penguin, 2003).

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A Swedish official, identified as 'Sting', who claimed to be deeply concerned about the Bofors cover-up in his country, was her 'Deep Throat' and principal source of information. Sting gave Chitra confidential documents and guided her investigations. Three payment trails were tracked. First, a set of four secret Swiss bank accounts linked to the Hindujas. Next, transfers to the Bofors' agent in Delhi, Win Chadha, who fled to Dubai. And third, payments made to a Swiss account in the name of A.E. Services run by Robert A. Wilkinson, who was suspected of fronting for Quattrocchi.

Sting also passed on another set of official papers to Chitra in 1988. In this gold-mine were the Swedish NAB Report and the private diaries of Martin Ardbo, Bofors' managing director, who had resigned after being arraigned following an exposure of certain dirty deals by the company in Dubai, Bahrain and Oman. Ardbo noted, on 2 July 1987, that 'Bob (Wilson) had talked with Gandhi Trustee lawyer'. In another entry, Chitra writes, he spoke of his worry about 'Q because of his links to R'.

The revelations cut close to the bone, and pressure was brought on *The Hindu*. Chitra Subramaniam began receiving threats. She persevered, finding new outlets in *The Express* and *The Statesman*. The cover-up continued even after Rajiv Gandhi departed from office and this world. In 1992, Chitra received a fax from Sting copying a letter from the Indian foreign minister, Madhavsinh Solanki to his Swedish counterpart, whom he had met at Davos, to stop further Bofors investigations in Switzerland. Solanki protested his innocence but resigned when confronted with the evidence. Quattrocchi, until then still in India, fled the country to Malaysia and then to Argentina, resisting extradition and investigation, which the Indian authorities only weakly pursued. Bofors was a sordid episode that besmirched India's image and damaged the Army's morale. The gun, however, gave a stellar performance in the Kargil conflict in 1999, finally laying to rest all doubts about its deadly excellence. Politically, dark suspicions remained. The truth was buried.

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Nearer home, India responded quickly to an SOS from the Maldivian President, Abdul Gayoom, in 1988, to avert an offshore takeover of the islands by a group of mercenaries acting on behalf of internal dissident elements. Indian commandos were flown in. They apprehended the 'invading' vessel, rescued the hostages and delivered the miscreants to the local authorities for trial.

In July that same year, Rajiv Gandhi visited Islamabad. It was the first

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visit by an Indian prime minister to Pakistan since the Indus Water Treaty was signed in 1960. By then, Zia-ul-Haq had been killed in a mysterious helicopter crash and Benazir Bhutto was in office. Rajiv and Benazir were both young leaders and established a promising rapport. They agreed that neither side would attack the other's nuclear installations, and that both countries would abide by the Simla Agreement that Benazir had witnessed her father and Indira Gandhi sign. The bonhomie was short-lived as neither survived long in office.

Rajiv was harsher on Nepal when the Indo-Nepal trade and transit treaties came up for renewal. He was peeved over Nepal's seeking anti-aircraft guns and other ordnance stores from China, in contravention of a well-established understanding that the kingdom would turn to India for military supplies. Against whom were those anti-aircraft guns to be deployed? Further, Indians had been barred access to certain parts of Nepal's northern border, and permit and property restrictions had been imposed on Indian nationals in violation of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Friendship.

Nepal sought two separate treaties on the ground that transit was an international right enjoyed by landlocked states whereas trade was a matter of mutual negotiation. India, however, insisted on bracketing the two treaties, resulting in what Kathmandu somewhat grandiloquently termed a 'blockade', with the lapse of the transit agreement. More accurately, Nepal's generous transit facilities were reduced to what was strictly allowed under international law. Nonetheless the 'blockade' hurt, and the teach-them-a-lesson attitude needlessly soured relations. The matter could have been amicably settled, but was left unresolved until after the government changed in Delhi.

In Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah, though still smarting from his shabby ouster in 1984 by Indira Gandhi, had warmed up to Rajiv who was of his own generation. With the approach of the J&K polls in 1987, he allied his National Conference with the Congress, in the belief that it was advantageous for the state to have good relations with the Centre. With a number of hitherto dissident elements in the Valley having come together under the banner of the Muslim United Front (MUF), there appeared to be a credible challenge. These were a younger, post-1953 generation of Kashmiris who found hope in the fair elections that had been held in 1977 and 1983, unlike in the past.

Even if these seemingly pro-separatist elements won a number of seats, there was no way that the overall result would have gone against the nationalists, even in the Valley. Nevertheless, somebody somewhere in Delhi and/or Srinagar mindlessly panicked. The poll in the Valley

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was vitiated, especially in some Srinagar constituencies where the results were rigged after certain MUF candidates had established leads in the counting. Those who protested were roughed up. Among those cheated of probable victory were young men who took to militancy and crossed the border, like Salahuddin who now heads a jihadi front in Muzaffarabad. This was a gross error of political judgment and gave rise to insurgency in Kashmir.

The deteriorating political conditions and mounting discord, aggravated by drought, had led to increasing media criticism that chafed Rajiv. The unremitting pursuit of the Bofors scandal was, possibly, the last straw. In August 1988, the government introduced a Defamation Bill curbing tendentious writing and placing the onus of proof on offending papers. The popular outcry nationwide was reinforced by critical international reactions. In Delhi, senior journalists and editors marched in protest down Rajpath from India Gate to Vijay Chowk, with placards decrying the draconian measure. The bill went through the Lok Sabha but, fearing it might not find easy passage in the Rajya Sabha, was withdrawn.

The Sarkaria Commission's report on Centre-state relations was submitted towards the end of Rajiv Gandhi's term. Rather than make any radical recommendations in response to the growing clamour for states' rights, the commission made a sober plea for cooperative federalism. The spirit of the report was captured in the statement that 'federalism is more a functional arrangement for cooperative action than a static institutional concept. Article 258 provides a tool by the use of which cooperative federalism can be substantially realised in the working of the system'. Article 258 provides that the President may, with the consent of the government of a state, entrust either conditionally or unconditionally to that government or to its officers functions in relation to any matter to which the executive power of the Union extends. The Sarkaria Commission sought to encourage devolution of planning and financial powers to the states and districts through this route. The commission dwelt on the importance of independent governors, whose task it must be to see that a government is formed, and not try to induct a government that pursues policies that he or she approves.

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The continuing drift in Punjab with no end to blood-letting remained a matter of wide concern. Delhi itself appeared a city under siege with sand-bagged bunkers, armed patrols, searches and road barriers. Forty

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academics, professionals, public figures and Akali, Congress, BJP, Lok Dal, Janata and other party leaders gathered for the Second Delhi Dialogue on the Punjab Question, in September 1988, with Inder Gujral and Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh (retired) in the chair. I participated in the dialogue for which I had prepared the position paper, after months of deliberation within Inder Gujral's Punjab Group that periodically met at his residence. My view had been to follow Mao's famous aphorism that likened guerrillas to fish in water. Drain the bowl and the fish will not survive.

A clear consensus emerged at the dialogue on the convening of an all-party round table conference at the earliest. Political parties were advised to take the initiative to form multi-level committees in Punjab to intercede with the authorities on matters troubling ordinary citizens, in order to redress their grievances. It was agreed that very few favoured Khalistan, while the vast majority were firmly opposed to mindless terrorist violence and state repression. Nor were the people communally divided. A tiny minority had been trying to exploit these issues, but in vain. However, a sense of alienation and emotional hurt survived among large sections of the population, on account of the government's failure to hold anyone accountable for the 1984 riots, or to pursue cases filed on behalf of the victims.

President's Rule had not brought peace, nor assisted in bringing about a settlement in Punjab. On the contrary, it had become counter-productive by arresting the political process, which needed to be revived. Pakistani intervention was the consequence and not the cause of the Punjab problem, although it had now become a major aggravation. A Punjab settlement was imperative to render Pakistani intervention ineffective. The Golden Temple and other gurdwaras had to be handed back to their lawful custodians and it was necessary to ensure that no place of worship anywhere was misused. Finally, fresh steps had to be taken to implement the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, in letter and spirit.

With the general elections approaching towards the end of 1989, the law had been amended to lower the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen. This would swell the electorate by about thirty-five million. A series of state elections had been held and the Congress had fared poorly. Efforts had been made to educate the voters, ensure correct and complete electoral rolls, prevent rigging and booth capturing and also to keep the role of money power down to a minimum. The Election Commission was in the vanguard, but various groups led by men like Justice Krishna Iyer, Tarkunde and Krishan Kant and organisations like Citizens for Democracy had championed the cause, marking the

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beginning of what has since become a national election-watch network. With elections in Tamil Nadu imminent, C. Subramaniam set up an Observer Group to keep vigil in twenty-five key constituencies in the state. I was one of nine observers. One of the curious features we came across in an otherwise relatively fair poll was the violation of the model code of conduct by parties, by mutual consent!

The national elections as also elections to five of the state legislatures were announced in mid-October and took place six weeks later. The Congress had lost its sheen. There was disappointment about its record in Sri Lanka, Assam and Punjab. There was resentment over widespread corruption, and the immense damage done to the prime minister's image by the Bofors scandal was reflected in the taunt: *'Gali, gali mein shor hai, Rajiv Gandhi chor hai!'* (Every lane rings with the cry that Rajiv Gandhi is a thief!)

There were other problems too. Communalism was on the rise with grievous riots in Bhagalpur, Meerut and Mailana (near Delhi), and with tensions stemming from the belligerent new thrust given by the BJP to its programme to build a Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. Moreover, the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, a rural employment programme introduced by the government, was yet to really kick in. Also, the more ambitious move to decentralise government by the devolution of powers to the panchayats and municipalities had been stalled. The two panchayati raj bills for rural and urban local self-government sailed through the Lok Sabha but were narrowly defeated in the Rajya Sabha. These were not legislated until three years later to become the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts.

The Thakkar Commission had been appointed to inquire into the security arrangements made for Indira Gandhi, and the lapses therein, leading to her assassination. A preliminary report was received in November 1985 and the final report in February 1986. The commission found the two bodyguards Beant Singh and Satwant Singh guilty, but spoke of 'grave suspicion' regarding the 'complicity and involvement' of R.K. Dhawan, the late PM's special assistant, who 'played a role in facilitating the crime'. While there was no hard evidence to that effect, it did not rule out 'the involvement of a foreign agency', as there were elements abroad that wished to destabilise India.

Having said this, Justice Thakkar curiously stated that his final report should not be made public pending the further investigations he had recommended, as publication was 'likely to cause embarrassment or prejudice to the suspect', presumably Dhawan, who remained close to the new regime. It was known that Indira Gandhi had not wanted her

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Sikh bodyguards to be taken off duty and that Dhawan had ensured this, countermanding orders to the contrary, from elsewhere. The other finding against Dhawan was that he possibly had something to do with changing the timing of the PM's television appointment on the fateful day from 8.30 a.m. to 9.00 a.m.

The government followed Justice Thakkar's advice and by an ordinance withheld the papers of the commission of inquiry, in the interests of national integrity and security. Almost two years later, *The Express* broke the story, having accessed the Thakkar report, or relevant portions thereof. There was a storm in Parliament. The then home secretary, R.D. Pradhan, was later to record that the explanation for the ordinance was carried by *The Telegraph*. It said that P.N. Lekhi, Satwant Singh's lawyer wished to see the Thakkar Report, which he may have used in defence of his client, thus obfuscating matters and delaying the course of justice.* It was a credible explanation but was not offered at the time. Given the mood in the country after a series of scandals, critics were quick to allege another cover-up following Rajiv Gandhi's announcement that Dhawan had been cleared of all suspicion after a special investigation.

The Opposition had been polarised by the Ayodhya campaign and was also in some disarray in the run-up to the elections. The secular elements, however, appeared to be veering towards the formation of a national front with V.P. Singh, now head of the Janata Dal, as their potential champion, though there were other contenders for leadership. Desirous of fixing him, suspected Congress elements circulated a news report that had earlier appeared in some Kuwaiti and Turkish papers to the effect that Ajeya Singh, the NRI son of V.P. Singh, had deposited $21 million, with his father as the beneficiary, in a numbered account in the First Trust Corporation in St. Kitts, a tiny Caribbean island. The managers of the bank said the statement was a forgery. The government said it was probing the matter. The St. Kitts caper ultimately recoiled on the Congress whose machinations stood exposed.

The Ram Janambhoomi movement had steadily gathered momentum. All through October and November, processions carrying shilas (bricks) baked in every part of the country started arriving in Ayodhya. These were for the proposed Ram mandir. A great shilanyas puja was planned on 9 November. It was to be a ceremonial laying of the foundation stone for the proposed Ram temple at a site all agreed was undisputed. Yet this appeared to invite trouble, in view of the close proximity of the 'undisputed site' to the disputed masjid and the large crowds it attracted.

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*See R.D. Pradhan, *Working With Rajiv Gandhi* (Delhi: Indus, 1995).

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If in 1977 Indira was India, in 1989 the Congress's selling point seemed to be that Rajiv was India, as embodied in the party's central advertising slogan, 'My heart beats for India'—the 'my' in the ads clearly denoting Rajiv Gandhi. The Congress was portrayed as a party with 'one voice, one policy, one leader' in contrast to the assorted 'Jhagda Dals'. But an objective assessment of the five years of Rajiv's rule showed that the record was mixed, even negative. Institutional decline had proceeded apace with the centralisation and personalisation of authority. The President had been denigrated, Parliament by-passed, the judiciary pressured, AIR and Doordarshan appropriated for personal aggrandisement, the intelligence services subverted, the comptroller and auditor general vilified, the Army Chief disparaged and the foreign secretary peremptorily removed at a press conference.

The checks and balances had gone. The Agricultural Credit Review Committee lamented that the autonomy of the Reserve Bank had been eroded, and the credit system politicised—witness the loan melas. Federalism had been undermined and governors reduced to subservience. A presidential style superimposed on a parliamentary system had not worked. The indictment was severe. There was an erosion in support for the Congress, with its adoption of soft Hindutva (as the opening of the Babri Masjid locks and the permission granted for the shilanyas were interpreted).The fledgling National Front gathering around V.P. Singh began to be seen as an alternative.

The Congress (I) campaign was fought in the first person singular and its final appeal said it all. 'As far as I am concerned,' said Rajiv Gandhi, staring at readers from full-page newspaper advertisements, 'I am not going to let anyone deprive me of my dream, my hope for India.' The country decided otherwise, despite a good Congress showing in the south. The Congress tally was reduced from 415 seats to a little over 200 with an 8 per cent swing against it, though it still remained the largest single party.

There was violence and rigging, the responsibility for which must be shared by all parties. But the largest number of repolls ordered anywhere—in ninety-seven polling booths—was in Rajiv Gandhi's own Amethi constituency, where he was opposed by Rajmohan Gandhi.

The bogey of a hung Parliament haunted many. This stemmed from a fear of coalitions and a lack of understanding of the social dynamics of an inert 'Bharat' stirring to life at the bottom of the demographic pyramid. This had resulted in the ongoing empowerment of millions of the 'shirtless and voiceless' and women, hitherto outside the charmed circle of 'India' but now politically conscious and organised, a process that continues to this day.

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The other bit of demonology that muddied the discourse revolved around the notion of the 'unsustainability', even 'illegitimacy', of a 'minority government'. This had many confusing the constitutional injunction that every government must enjoy the 'confidence of the (lower) House' with a numerical counting of heads somehow to muster a figure of half the total strength of the House plus one, a recipe for horse-trading and defections to garner a 'majority'. This ignored the fact that minority governments had not been unknown in India and had survived on 'outside' support.

The 1989 poll did not return a clear verdict. The Congress was ousted, getting no more than 197 seats. The Janata Dal won 143 seats but assumed office as a minority government with external support from the BJP and the Left.

Enter V.P. Singh.

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MANDAL-KAMANDAL

Vishwanath Pratap Singh assumed office on 2 December 1989 with considerable goodwill, but uncertainty over how long a minority government might last, considering the number of prima donnas within its fold. It was, moreover, utterly dependent on the support of the BJP and the Left, which subscribed to diametrically opposed ideologies.

The National Front (NF) had been in the making over the past several months, and had grown out of the Janata Dal, an amalgam of existing parties and factions brought together by increasing disenchantment with the performance of the Rajiv Gandhi administration. V.P.Singh had enhanced his standing by winning a by-election from Allahabad, having earlier resigned his Congress seat. Sniping had begun the moment he assumed leadership of the Janata Dal after quitting the Congress (I). Seat adjustments within the larger National Front for the ensuing general election had proved a ticklish problem.

The result of the elections, which were held in November 1989, were somewhat unexpected. The Congress alliance managed to retain only 215 seats, with the NF winning 146, the BJP 86 and the Left 52 seats. It was clearly V.P. Singh's victory. The Congress had been defeated, but the National Front needed external props to form a government. The CPI (M) leader, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, was instrumental in getting the Left to offer unconditional support to the NF. The BJP followed, knowing it must bide its time.

V.P. Singh was the obvious choice to lead the NF though there were other contenders, Devi Lal, the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) chief minister of Haryana, and Chandrashekhar of the Janata Dal prime among them.

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The latter could not contain his ambition but was prepared to accommodate Devi Lal (who, he felt, would not long survive), in order to keep out VP. Sensing that numbers did not favour him, Devi Lal offered his support to VP. But in order to salvage his pride, the wily Tau (elder) as Devi Lal was known, suggested that V.P. Singh propose his name at the NF party meeting, whereupon he would decline in his favour. VP unwisely fell in with this ploy. Chandrashekhar, who had seconded Devi Lal's nomination, was surprised and enraged at the turn of events. It was an inauspicious beginning for the National Front.

Emboldened by his gamesmanship, Tau rushed to Delhi's Haryana Bhavan where he tendered his resignation as chief minister before the assembled BLD MLAs and ordered them to resolve that he be appointed deputy prime minister. They were then to elect his son, Om Prakash Chautala, as leader of the state legislature party so that he would be sworn in as chief minister. Devi Lal had staged another coup. NF members were agitated and VP embarrassed, but there was little that could be done.

Vishwanath Pratap Singh was sworn in as prime minister with only one other Cabinet colleague, Devi Lal, who took his oath as 'I, Devi Lal, Deputy Prime Minister . . .' an unauthorised and irregular departure from the constitutional text that caused President Venkataraman no little disquiet.

The story did not end there. Chautala had to be elected to the Haryana Assembly of which he was not a member. This deficiency was made good by naming him a candidate for a by-election to Meham. There was violence and rigging, causing the Election Commission to order a re-poll. Ajit Singh, his own Cabinet colleague, called on Devi Lal to quit, which he did, but the prime minister was persuaded not to accept his resignation, so as not to rock the government. V.P.Singh probably succumbed to pressure against his better judgment. In any case, the damage was done and was further compounded when, as head of the Janata Dal parliamentary board, Devi Lal sacked Ajit Singh from the post of party secretary.

Chautala was forced to resign as chief minister as a result of the brouhaha over the disputed by-election and a CBI inquiry was ordered into the Meham poll. Devi Lal denounced this as a conspiracy. Within weeks, Chautala tired of sitting on the sidelines. He got Banarsi Das Gupta, his successor as chief minister, to resign and had himself reinstated. Party and public opinion alike were incensed. V.P. Singh sent in his own resignation to the new Janata Dal president, S.R. Bommai, in disgust.

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The NF and its allies, however, stood by V.P. Singh. They got him to withdraw his resignation, whereupon Devi Lal implicated the prime minister in the Bofors scandal on the basis of a letter he produced, which was later shown to be a forgery. Devi Lal was dismissed. Thus ended a sordid tale. But the prime minister now had two scarcely veiled enemies in the wings, Devi Lal and Chandrashekhar.

V.P. Singh's Cabinet comprised many who were quite seasoned in the political arena. Inder Gujral took over the foreign office; Madhu Dandavate, finance; George Fernandes, railways; Arun Nehru, commerce and tourism; Arif Mohammad Khan, energy; Dinesh Goswami, law; and P. Upendra, information and broadcasting. The prime minister kept the defence portfolio and entrusted home to Mufti Mohammad Sayeed from J&K. This last was welcomed as a significant and innovative appointment but was soon to provide the growingly assertive Kashmir militants with a window of opportunity to hit back at the government.

The new prime minister broadcast to the nation setting out his priorities, a day after assuming office. Delhi may glitter, he said, 'But millions of Indian homes are without the light of hope. The voice of the government will be the voice of such homes and the voice of peasants, workers and the youth. If power is a sword, it will be wielded on behalf of the poor and toiling masses.' Mention was made of open government, decentralisation and genuine federalism, the restoration of the sanctity of democratic institutions, the establishment of a Lok Pal, freedom of information, autonomy for broadcasting, social justice for the weaker sections, women and minorities and a commitment to devote 50 per cent of the Eighth Plan outlays to the rural sector.

One of the first initiatives taken by the PM was to visit Amritsar and offer prayers at the Golden Temple. Encouraged by the overwhelming response, he thought of ending President's Rule and ordering fresh elections, but resiled from that step in view of the opposition to it from some of his colleagues and coalition partners.

*

On 8 December, news came from Srinagar that JKLF militants, led by Yasin Malik, had kidnapped Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of the Union home minister. The government was in a tizzy. Several Islamic scholars denounced the kidnapping as un-Islamic. Nevertheless, it was decided to concede the kidnappers' demands and release five militants from prison, for fear that Rubaiya Sayeed might otherwise be harmed. This was done on 13 December amidst jubilation by the militants and their sympathisers. The government had caved in. Rumours were rife that

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Kashmir would celebrate its 'liberation' on 26 January, India's Republic Day.

Responding to criticism that it had been soft, the Centre decided on sterner measures. It reappointed Jagmohan, a strong administrator and former governor of J&K, in place of General Krishna Rao, over the objections of Farooq Abdullah who, no doubt, recalled his previous ouster in 1984 at his hands. The Kashmir Affairs Committee constituted in Delhi added to the confusion, further accentuated with George Fernandes' appointment as Minister for Kashmir Affairs. While Jagmohan favoured firm action, Fernandes favoured a more conciliatory approach.

Jagmohan was sworn in on 19 January and, taking counsel with his adviser, Ved Marwah, and the 15th Corps Commander, General M.A. Zaki, determined to thwart any secessionist or subversive activities. Meanwhile, a local 'mutiny' by elements of the Kashmir Armed Police in Srinagar, was triggered by some false information. Four IAF officers were brutally murdered, and curfew was declared on 25 January. Srinagar was virtually sealed, and plans for disrupting the Republic Day ceremonies were foiled. Tension mounted. An all-party parliamentary delegation visited Srinagar, where Rajiv Gandhi, now leader of the Opposition, chose to harangue and belittle the governor and play to the gallery.

Relations between Jagmohan and Farooq Abdullah deteriorated further, leading to the imposition of Governor's Rule. The Centre felt piqued that it had not been consulted, but under the J&K constitution the governor was fully empowered to act as he did. Continuous curfew, cordon and search operations, militant attacks, bombings and firings had inflamed sentiments. Well-known and respected personalities—including the eighty-seven-year-old freedom-fighter, Maulana Masoodi; the station director, AIR, Srinagar, Lassa Koul; the Vice Chancellor of Kashmir University, Mashirul Haq; and the general manager of HMT, H.L. Khera—were assassinated. Moreover, public sector factories like ITI were compelled to shut down.

Kashmiri Pandits were targeted, and posters appeared warning them to quit the Valley or face dire consequences. Some families left but, as pressure mounted, the trickle became a flood. Jagmohan offered transport facilities to facilitate their movement and job security in Jammu, and was, thereupon, uncharitably accused of orchestrating the exodus. Ultimately, over 150,000 Pandits left. The secessionists had forced an ethnic cleansing of Kashmir. Many Kashmiri Muslim families also left to avoid extortion, involuntary 'hospitality' to militant intruders, 'recruitment' of their sons for militancy and the forcible marriages of their daughters with militants. That was another human tragedy.

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I visited Srinagar towards the end of March 1990. The city seemed under siege with barricades, bunkers and armed patrols everywhere. The national media had disgracefully fled the scene, a situation subsequently redeemed by a number of women reporters who forayed into the Valley periodically, to file despatches. The same thing had happened after Operation Blue Star in Punjab and, earlier, in Assam-NEFA in 1962. The result was that the Valley was rife with rumours.

I met a cross-section of people, among them the young *Al-Safa* editor, Mohammad Shaban, who was killed soon thereafter because he had defied the militants. The Mirwaiz, Maulvi Farooq, lamented what had happened, spoke of reconciliation and thought that cross-border tension would ease were the LOC opened for controlled movement. I also met Yasin Malik, Abdul Ghani Butt and Abbas Ansari, all soon to become pillars of the Hurriyat. The streets were deserted before dusk and, as night fell, there would be an eerie clanging of metal objects and, for hours thereafter, an assembled cry would rise from the city's mosques, *'Hum kya chahate: aazadi!'* (What do we desire: freedom!)

Then on 21 May, the Mirwaiz was assassinated by Hizbul Mujahideen gunmen for talking peace, and his cortege tragically fired upon by panicky security personnel. The Valley erupted in turmoil. V.P. Singh recalled Jagmohan and appointed Girish Saxena, a former RAW chief, in his place. There was considerable agitation, in the country and internationally, over human rights violations in Punjab and J&K. Yet the militants were no innocents. Between 1 January 1990 and 15 May 1991, the record shows that militants in J&K had killed 581 civilians and 215 security personnel. During this same period, 1840 AK-47/56/74 rifles, 1014 pistols, and revolvers, 139 assorted machine guns, 362 rockets, 84 rocket-propelled guns, and large quantities of ammunition, explosives and communications equipment were also recovered from them. Quite an arsenal that! Punjab too suffered no less grievously.

*

Disturbed by the deliberate targeting of the media by militant secessionist elements, the Press Council was approached by the Punjab government and, subsequently, by the Army Chief, General S.F. Rodrigues, to inquire into the matter. The Army's complaint was that its press notes and rebuttals were being ignored by a press under pressure, with alleged human rights abuses being used to demoralise the security forces, wage psychological warfare to win the hearts and minds of the people and prejudice international opinion against India.

I was a member of the Press Council of India (PCI) at the time, and

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was asked to lead a three-man fact-finding team to Punjab and J&K.* After studying the situation, we noted that over 3700 persons were killed in Punjab during 1990. Out of this, the total number of media personnel killed during the past decade was 65. Some 52 of these belonged to the Hind Samachar Group alone and included the founder-editor, Lala Jagat Narain, and his son and successor, Romesh Chander. The quality of weapons and the training imparted to the terrorists had become more sophisticated, thanks to Pakistan's complicity, facilitated by a porous border (despite the fencing and flood-lighting of certain sectors), with smugglers acting as guides. Around 220 terrorist gangs had been listed consisting of hardcore elements, some 900 others, and yet more comprising plain criminals, while some 40 gangs were reported to be ideologically motivated or concerned with 'social reform' such as enforcing dress codes, cultural norms and religious taboos against drinking liquor.

With the killing of judicial officers and threats to witnesses and lawyers, the criminal justice system had collapsed. Of approximately 11,000 persons booked since 1984, only 32 had been convicted. Even victims were afraid to testify. Investigations had stalled, and bail was never refused. Crime statistics had disappeared. Every incident or killing tended to be broadly attributed to, or lumped with, terrorism because 'bounties' and compensation were linked to 'terrorist' killings.

The breakdown in the judicial system had had an unfortunate fall-out. Despite resorting to summary procedures under TADA, special courts, in-camera proceedings, and accepting the admissibility of confessions made to police officers of the rank of an SP and above, nothing worked. Hence the security agencies were engaging in undercover operations and fake encounters.

The media was trapped between the devil and the deep sea, some reporting only what was safe to publish. Threats and hit-lists were being published, causing fear, and bhog (funeral service) notices eulogising known criminals and murderers as 'martyrs' were being carried on pain of consequences. The media was compelled to follow a six-page 'Panthic Code' while reporting 'from the Land of Khalistan'. It demanded the use of the term militant or mujahideen in place of 'terrorist'; the omission of the prefix 'so-called' or 'self-styled' before the rank of terrorist commanders; the affixing of the term 'Sant' to Bhindranwale's name; and avoidance of any reference to the Panthic Committee as being Pakistan-based.

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*The team's report, titled 'Crisis and Credibility' was published in book form (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991).

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It was no idle diktat. The station director, AIR, a paralytic cancer patient, was gunned down at home while on two days' leave for his daughter's marriage, for violation of the 'code'. The Punjab press, we discovered, was divided and confused, helpless and angry, polarised and, in some cases, partisan. As in Kashmir, many found safety in silence.

If developments in Punjab possibly influenced the course of events in Kashmir, the eruption of widely separated freedom movements globally in 1988 and 1989 certainly did. Among these were the popular defiance against the authorities at Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the Burmese people's freedom struggle under Aung San Suu Kyi, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, as also the overthrowing of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the ferment in Soviet Central Asia and the Philippines. In the early euphoria created by the National Front's more liberal media policy, Doordarshan felt it had struck gold. With limited footage of its own, it found a plenitude of exciting, revolutionary material elsewhere on people's power in action, which it broadcast to fascinated audiences from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari. The impact on Kashmir was heady. The cry of 'Aazadi!' went up. The media, as in Punjab, was caught in a pincer.

The PCI team, all too aware that the truth is an early casualty in conflict zones, selected for investigation in J&K three or four of the worst cases of human rights violations reported against the Army. The most serious of these pertained to the alleged mass rape of twenty-six or more women at Kunan Poshpora, a village in Kupwara district, by a named military unit headquartered at Trehgam, the tehsil headquarters.

We visited Kupwara town, Trehgam and Kunan village and spoke to the district magistrate, the police officials, the CO, officers and men of the concerned unit, the elders and alleged victims' families, in the presence of the Trehgam tehsildar, the village kazi, the doctors who examined the alleged rape victims many days after the incident, local media representatives and human rights groups. We had earlier met the Kashmir commissioner, Wajahat Habibullah, who was kind enough to share, informally, his inquiry report with us. Finally, back in Delhi, we were able to see a video cassette of the alleged Kunan Poshpora incident that had been passed on to us by a respected NGO, on behalf of the secessionist elements, who claimed they had shot the film after revisiting Kunan Poshpora and interviewing each of the women who had allegedly been raped, their parents and other villagers. It concluded with an impassioned political harangue by the kazi.

Apart from the glaring gaps and contradictions in the evidence, the video recording, carefully staged two to three months after the alleged

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event, had obviously been made for propaganda purposes. Our committee concluded that the reports of human rights excesses investigated by it had been grossly exaggerated or invented. Excesses elsewhere in Kashmir had also been inquired into and action taken against the guilty.

We found the two most serious allegations against the Army, namely, the so-called Dudhi killings and the Kunan Poshpora rape were without foundation. We concluded:

> The Kunan rape story on close examination turns out to be a massive hoax orchestrated by militant groups and their sympathisers and mentors in Kashmir and abroad, as part of a sustained and cleverly contrived strategy of psychological warfare, and as an entry point for re-inscribing Kashmir on the international agenda, as a human rights issue. The loose ends and contradictions in the story expose a tissue of lies by many persons and at many levels.

We made recommendations for monitoring the misuse of the Disturbed Areas Act and Armed Forces Special Powers Act, and night searches. We criticised the decision to keep out foreign media and international human rights organisations from J&K as counter-productive. This had resulted in a loss of credibility and given currency, through indirect reportage, to rumours, unverified assertions by militant organisations and their front agencies abroad. Based on those accounts, India had been arraigned before the UN Human Rights Commission, the British Parliament, the US Congress and the European Union. Finally, we congratulated the Indian Army for breaking new ground by throwing open its human rights record in the field to public scrutiny, through the PCI. Few armies in the world, we believed, would invite such scrutiny.

The PCI report created a tremendous stir. Secessionist leaders in J&K—Yasin Malik among them—sought to rubbish it as a whitewash, as did certain human rights groups in Delhi. I was hauled over the coals by an emotionally charged feminist group in Delhi. The US embassy's Robin Raphel, and the UK's shadow foreign secretary, Robin Cook, discussed the findings with me. The Army felt vindicated. No further videos were, I believe, thereafter made of so-called human rights atrocities in Kashmir. A lesson had been learnt.

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Meanwhile, down south across the Palk Straits, little had gone right after the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987. The Indian Peace Keeping

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Force had become bogged in the longest war the Indian Army had engaged in since Independence. The LTTE had not been pinned down to anything and had not signed the India-brokered peace accord, which it proceeded to defy. It did not disarm and insisted on being treated as the only rightful representatives of the Tamils, even as the Sri Lankan army withdrew to its barracks in the north and east. Thereafter, some senior LTTE cadres who were captured took their lives by consuming cyanide capsules. This triggered attacks on Sinhala civilians, causing the survivors to flee south, and sparked communal violence.

In fact, General Sam Manekshaw (retired) bluntly criticised India's uncertain political aims, inadequate planning and the existence of what was virtually an LTTE fifth column in Tamil Nadu.* He noted that the IPKF had suffered severe losses—1500 killed and casualties numbering, maybe, 4 times that figure—and asked, why?

There were several reasons. The control and command structure and civil-military interface were less than satisfactory. There were different assessments by MEA, the IB and RAW and lack of rapport between the COAS and the PM, Rajiv Gandhi. The Indian High Commissioner, J.N. Dixit, had virtually assumed the role of a pro-consul in Colombo. The IPKF formations were grossly unprepared, as they had ventured forth on the assumption that they were on a brief peace-keeping mission, whereas they were plunged into a military conflict with no clear view as to whether the LTTE was merely to be crippled or destroyed. The full range of weapons could not be deployed. Moreover, maps and intelligence were lacking.

V.P. Singh's tenure saw the IPKF's withdrawal from Sri Lanka. A provincial government headed by Varadarajan Perumal of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Force (EPRLF) elected under the IPKF's umbrella was seen as an Indian protégé. In the south, Sri Lankan forces were engaged in subduing a JVP rebellion. With fresh elections due in Sri Lanka, Jayawardene decided to retire and yielded place to his prime minister, Premadasa, who had been lukewarm to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. His elevation to the presidency signalled an end to the role of the IPKF on the island. Its withdrawal was completed in March 1990, and the homecoming troops were accorded a ceremonial welcome in Madras. The chief minister, Karunanidhi, was conspicuously

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*This was in the foreword to *The IPKF in Sri Lanka* (Noida: Trishul Publications, 1991) on the IPKF's Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka, authored by Lieutenant General Depinder Singh (retired), formerly GOC Southern Command and Overall Force Commander, IPKF.

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absent! The sympathies of certain elements in Tamil Nadu for the LTTE was no secret. With the IPKF's departure, the LTTE abandoned negotiations and declared war on Colombo, forcing Perumal to seek refuge in India.

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Meanwhile, a rising tide of sectarian and ethnic violence persuaded the government to reconstitute and reconvene the dormant National Integration Council, which had first been brought into being in 1961 and then revived fitfully. Growing communal polarisation between 1986 and 1991 had resulted in over 5000 communal incidents in which 3336 persons had been killed and over 26,000 injured according to an official count, the figure peaking in 1990-91 with the rising tempo of the Ram Janambhoomi movement. But other factors were involved as well, including insurgency and terrorism in J&K, Punjab and the North-east, and Naxalism or Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

The depredations of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) had increased considerably, since its inception in 1979 as a militant offshoot of the All-Assam Student's Union (AASU). It now accused AASU of selling out instead of struggling to overthrow the 'Indian colonial regime' with the aim of establishing a socialist society. By 1990, it was running a parallel administration in parts of Assam, collecting taxes, extorting money and holding 'courts'. It was determined to combat illicit immigration from Bangladesh, cleanse the state of 'foreigners', and stimulate development and investment to provide jobs, which it had scared away in the first instance by its violent activities.

The Bodo agitation for a separate state on the north bank of the Brahmaputra had also gathered momentum, with bandhs that severely disrupted road and rail communications. Left Wing Extremists were active in Andhra and Bihar. Their focus was on tribal land and forest alienation and oppression by landlords and petty officials. In 1990, the NIC was informed that the People's War Group aimed to liberate the trans-Godavari basin covering contiguous areas in Andhra, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (Bastar) and Orissa.

Social justice for the marginalised and weaker sections and reforms in other areas seemed an effective way to resolve such conflicts peacefully, and they were high on V.P. Singh's agenda. He was concerned about the plight of the tribals and Dalits and set up a Women's Commission as well. He was, moreover, for the free flow of information, and autonomy for broadcasting. As the government planned to promote freedom of information, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) brought together a

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body of experts from different disciplines and departments of government to discuss establishing the citizen's right to know.

It did not take much research to discover how archaic Indian laws were, with files routinely carrying 'confidential' or higher classifications, which precluded informed consideration and decision making. Archival material was also often kept under wraps on 'security' considerations without any application of mind. Officials and ministers were bound by oaths of secrecy, and governance was based on the need to know rather than the right to know. Secrecy prevailed even between departments of government, and Centre and state. The moment senior officials retired, they too would find themselves beyond the pale. Consequently, little was brought on public record. The entire policy was and remains retrograde.

The CPR workshop was a great success and an eye-opener. Many recognised that freedom of information was not an esoteric right of interest merely to the rich and powerful, but a popular right that would empower the meek and lowly, as information is power. On the basis of the discussions, officials set to work to carry matters forward and prepare draft legislation. The government fell. Interests shifted. The matter was lost until the Right to Information Act was enacted fifteen years later.

Around the same time (1990), the information and broadcasting minister, P. Upendra, introduced the Prasar Bharati Bill to confer autonomy on AIR and Doordarshan, something that the Janata government had failed to push through Parliament, just after the Emergency. Some of us whom Upendra consulted saw the bill as an instrument that would facilitate the transfer of power to the people through the broadcast media. Some had urged that radio and television be separated and not placed under a single, powerful monopoly. After much deliberation, it was felt that it would be best to keep both under a single agency in view of commonalities and shared overheads. A unified body would also ensure that radio was not neglected, an assumption sadly belied. It was hoped that entertainment, information and education would receive equal emphasis and that autonomy would filter down to the regions through internal devolution.

With the passage of the Prasar Bharati Act, the country moved a step towards bringing into being a public service broadcasting system with several laudable features. Prasar Bharati was to be overseen by a Board of Governors, independently appointed and accountable to the public through its programmes, and to Parliament through its annual report and budget. Financial autonomy was to be promoted by providing the

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corporation with its own fund, separate from the Consolidated Fund of India, into which broadcast receiver licence and service fees and advertisement and programme revenues would be credited.

External Services and the Monitoring Service were to be a charge on the government and, hopefully, development departments like education, health, agriculture and environment would pay user charges for programmes promoting their activities, editorial control at all times remaining with Prasar Bharati. The expectation was also that independent programme producers would be granted lateral access, providing an element of contrast and competition. There was to be a high powered Broadcast Council, and such regional councils as might be set up, to adjudicate complaints on matters of taste and standards.

The 1990 Bill was an improvement on the 1978 Bill but some of us suggested further amendments more clearly to define its charter. We also sought to fight off some negative amendments that had been moved in a fractious House. One of these was that a parliamentary committee be set up to oversee the working of Prasar Bharati. This would have been a disaster had it been rendered operational. Fortunately, that never happened. The Prasar Bharati Act was, however, not notified until seven years later while the debate continued.

Among the proposals I canvassed in order to promote competition and diversity of expression was that local communities, approved institutions and independent producers might be separately licensed by a statutory broadcast licensing authority, subject to periodic renewal based on performance and conformity with certain standards. These local stations could then be encouraged to federate upwards to form regional entities which, once consolidated, might in turn further federate to form a nodal national broadcast network parallel to Prasar Bharati, but operating on rather more commercial principles. None of these ideas took root and it was many years before community radio came to be officially validated, though with several limitations.

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V.P. Singh also went ahead with the establishment of a national security council to take a broader view of all aspects of national security, going beyond military security to embrace economic, environmental, social and cultural security. The results were somewhat disappointing. Wider consultation might have helped build a consensus and achieved more.

Fissures within the ruling coalition were apparent. And, while the Congress poured scorn on the government, the BJP was busy working on an electoral strategy to consolidate Hindu votes to leverage itself into

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power. Earlier, V.P. Singh had toyed with the idea of a snap election, which he believed he could win by a comfortable margin and shake off his dependence on the likes of Devi Lal. The latter was equally determined to oust V.P. Singh and had planned a massive rally of rural (read Jat) supporters in Delhi on 9 August 1990. In what was considered by some as a preemptive move but was obviously more than that, the prime minister announced in Parliament, on 7 August, the government's decision to implement the Mandal Report granting 27 per cent reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Mandal had submitted his report a decade earlier, but it had remained untouched as its recommendations were controversial and potentially divisive. The same fate had overtaken the first OBC Commission under Kaka Kalelkar. The Constitution states the need to ameliorate the condition of the socially and economically backward classes. Indeed, the principle of positive discrimination or affirmative action and reservation dates back a century and more in the former Madras Presidency and the princely state of Mysore. There, elaborate government orders lay down specific rules for recruitment to certain posts in a given communal rotation (rostering).

With reservations for SCs and STs aggregating 22.5 per cent the problem now was how to accommodate the more numerous and less distinctive OBCs and draw a line between those who were backward and others who claimed to be more backward. Mandal enumerated 52 per cent of the population as backward but limited the cut-off point for the granting of preferences to 27 per cent. The object was that, together with the separate SC/ST quota, the overall reservation should remain within the Supreme Court's ceiling of 50 per cent, even though some states have far exceeded that limit.

The government's announcement divided the country. Strident protests spilled on to the streets, with innumerable anti-reservation immolations by emotionally charged and impressionable youth worried about being elbowed out of educational and employment opportunities. The eye of the storm was in the large northern states. In the south this battle had been fought decades back, and more recently in the western region. The eastern states were less affected as backward classes there constitute a smaller proportion of the population.

The criticism against the Mandal decision was that it disregarded merit in a situation of large and growing unemployment. Further, the definition of 'backward' was rated unscientific. The scheme failed to provide any exit and was burdensome insofar as it initially appeared, mistakenly, to include a system of rostering, carry-over and promotions.

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Above all, critics felt it would entrench caste divisions when the need was for national unity.

Though the Mandal issue was part of the NF manifesto and the President's Address, the announcement took many by surprise. It begged the question of uplift of the backward classes in a more comprehensive and structured manner by attacking its roots through universal education, vocational training, access to credit, agrarian reforms and wider employment facilities. Without a larger package such as this, Mandalisation would be merely cosmetic, affording no more than fringe benefits to some.

The prime minister vigorously defended his initiative on political grounds. In his words, only by sharing the 'throne' of bureaucratic power would the backward classes be in a position to control the 'treasury' or decision-making process relating to the funding and prioritisation of economic opportunity. In other words, Mandal reservations would enable the backward classes to break into the power system and control their own destiny. Therefore it was futile to wait for universal education to create an extended meritocracy that included the backward classes. Once the backward were empowered, the rest would follow.

Mandal protagonists argued that the commission had built certain economic criteria into the definition of backwardness, on a point system. No exit criterion was required as the number of those belonging to the backward classes employed in Class I and II posts in the central government at the time was way below the proposed 27 per cent quota. Further, the preference accorded was to a class and not to individuals. Caste was also only one criterion and the ambit of backwardness extended to Muslims, Christians and others who qualified under the backwardness test. The disadvantaged among the upper castes could be accommodated within the reserved quota for the poor.

Middle-class hysteria had been unleashed. The debate raged back and forth. The 'in' group argued that the constitutional test of 'maintenance of efficiency in administration' should not be ignored. Therefore, meritorious candidates should not be squeezed out. That was countered with an apt rejoinder. If the administration had, thus far, been carried out by the 'meritorious' then pray explain the mess in which the country found itself! The recommendations of some state Backward Class Commissions proposing exit criteria were cited. Thus Andhra would exclude children of parents who had attained a given and easily measurable social or economic status. Such criterion would be simple and non-discriminatory and would skim off the 'creamy layer' and

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create space for more deserving backward categories. Indeed, many made reference to the growing size of the creamy layer within the SCs and STs at the cost of their more deprived brethren.

The entire discussion was, of course, to be seen in the broader context of population growth outstripping employment opportunities with nine million being added to the net labour force each year, many hovering just above the poverty line. Since social status moves up with economic opportunity, placement in the job market and skill formation to climb the ladder and be upwardly mobile becomes important. Ultimately, levelling up would be preferable to levelling down

V.P. Singh received accolades from disadvantaged groups, but his alienation from a large body of student youth, the urban middle class and the intellectual community was instant and widespread. Rather than try and bridge the divide, he stood firm and resolute when some symbolic gestures might have cooled passions. He was messianic in his zeal and explained his philosophy in an interview given to *The Times of India*: 'Transformational forces are not the same as transactional forces. You cannot do good politics, you cannot transform the country through transaction. Transformation has its own dynamics. It is uncompromising. There is no quid pro quo.' He saw OBC reservations as more than social justice and economic advancement. It entailed power-sharing. He had, he said, revelled in the 'management of contradictions'. Ultimately, some of the contradictions he sharpened proved to be his undoing. But he did, in a not altogether constructive sense, inscribe Fraternity on the national agenda.

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Even as the debate was joined, the BJP was busy sharpening its knives. Its carefully crafted electoral strategy of 'Hindu consolidation' was in danger of being undermined by the caste fragmentation that Madalisation implied. The answer to Mandal, therefore, was 'kamandal', a metaphor for the pot carried by the priestly and pious.

The latter half of the 1980s had seen the production and screening on television of several popular mythological serials, of which the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* by Ramanand Sagar and B.R. Chopra, respectively, had won an astronomic number of viewers. With mothers increasingly becoming breadwinners, and schooling that entailed long hours of commuting and much homework to complete at the end of the day, children did not necessarily hear these wonderful epic tales at their mothers' knee. Indeed, many mothers had themselves grown up knowing less and less about their rich heritage. 'Secular' schooling had also

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banished these stories from classrooms. So when Doordarshan screened the serials, they were an instant hit. Sunday mornings would be reserved for watching those magical moments, with entire families gathered in front of the television.

Critics argued that those weekly screenings, over two years, stirred a Hindu revival that the Sangh Parivar was quick to bend to its purpose. This is an outlandish point of view and I strongly supported the screening of these television serials as a great contribution to social education and cultural revival—not revivalism. A country without culture is de-nationalised. A false and narrow reading of secularism fails to distinguish religion from culture, which is the larger construct. Thus when Hinduism and Buddhism travelled to Central Asia, China and South-east Asia, by land and sea, they shaped local cultures in the matter of language, dress, architecture, festivals and certain manners and customs that survived changes in the established faith. Thus Thailand and Indonesia retain a pride in their Hindu culture and heritage although they are Buddhist and Islamic states, respectively.

Conversely, anyone who would exclude the many other strands and influences that have gone into the making of India's composite culture would rob it of its richness and variety and reduce it to something far less than what it truly is.

The Ram Janambhoomi movement gathered momentum. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) summoned sants and Shankaracharyas to its aid. The Congress under Rajiv Gandhi tried to win back some of the politico-religious space gained by the BJP and Sangh Parivar by playing godfather to the shilanyas puja, running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. After the 1989 polls, which saw the BJP register considerable gains, V.P.Singh picked up the threads. The Prophet's birthday was declared a national holiday as a sop to Muslim opinion.

Following the government's decision on Mandalisation, the BJP president, Lal Krishna Advani set out on his rath yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya on 25 September 1990, to mobilise support for the construction of the Ram Janambhoomi temple. The Babri Masjid Action Committee countered with a call to thwart any such development.

The government favoured a negotiated settlement pending the Allahabad High Court's decision on the title suit. The court's interim injunction for the maintenance of the status quo meanwhile held the field. The VHP, however, announced that the kar seva (for the construction of the temple) would commence on 30 October 1990 and called for volunteers, while the UP chief minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, initiated measures to maintain law and order.

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In a bid to defuse the immediate crisis, V.P. Singh promulgated an ordinance on 19 October, taking over the disputed structure. But he withdrew it four days later, allegedly in the face of Muslim opposition. This further muddied the waters even as Advani's rath kept rolling and arousing Hindu sentiments. Both Mulayam Singh in UP and Lalu Prasad Yadav, the Bihar chief minister, were determined to foil the communal holocaust they feared. On 23 October, Lalu Prasad had Advani arrested at Samastipur. An angry BJP immediately withdrew support to the National Front.

Reduced to a minority, V.P. Singh offered to resign. He was, however, persuaded by some of his colleagues and constituent NF units to face a vote of confidence, but only after the 30 October VHP deadline for the commencement of kar seva at Ayodhya, so that the BJP might be exposed. VP called on President Venkataraman a second time and was given until 7 November to face the Lok Sabha. Meanwhile, a strong force of para-military units was deployed around the disputed site and various other measures were set in motion to prevent any untoward events in Ayodhya. Kar sevaks who broke the cordon were beaten back, and some protestors were killed in the police firing. No harm came to the masjid.

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The political vacuum preceding the vote of confidence was filled with a cacophony of dissonant voices and efforts to patch together an alternative coalition, isolating the BJP. The Janata Dal component of the National Front split and Chandrashekhar was chosen to head the dissident group. On 7 November, V.P. Singh was defeated by 346 votes to 142. Scenting opportunity, and knowing that he would be in a position to call the shots and force general elections when the time was ripe, Rajiv Gandhi offered Congress support for a minority government led by Chandrashekhar.

On 10 November 1990, Chandrashekhar, the one-time fiery Congress Young Turk, was sworn in as the country's ninth prime minister, with Devi Lal as deputy prime minister. Though his ambition had been fulfilled, it was not his finest hour as he was no more than a stalking-horse for the Congress.

Chandrashekhar's approach to things was sometimes puzzling. For instance, way back in 1978-79, though a socialist and a staunch follower of Jayaprakash Narayan, he had done nothing to support the Kosi Kranti project for land reform in Bihar that his socialist colleague, Karpoori Thakur, had backed as chief minister. After the fall of the

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Janata government he earned some kudos for the pada yatra that he had undertaken in 1983, from Kanyakumari to Delhi. It was a circuitous 4000-kilometre, 6-month-long walk through the Indian countryside, when he had touched base with peasants and ordinary people and seen the wretchedness of so many. Something of this did rub off on him, and as prime minister he started an ashram at Bhondsi in Haryana, a short distance from Delhi, as part of a series of rural development centres scattered around the country, to project and pioneer sustainable change.

The first Gulf War, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, was a major development that affected India, given the large number of Indians working in the Gulf region. Chandrashekhar's decision to permit US military aircraft refuelling facilities in Bombay and Madras stirred controversy. Rajiv Gandhi was critical of his actions and found an excuse to round on him. On 6 March 1991, Chandrashekhar submitted his resignation. From the start he had been hostage to the Congress, and his administration had gone soft on prosecuting the Bofors case. This was manifest in the official stance taken in the Delhi High Court to stymie a case brought against the Hindujas for their alleged complicity in the matter.

The ensuing poll was no endorsement for either Mandal or masjid. The new chief election commissioner, T.N. Seshan, was loud and abrasive but held the ring firmly, making it clear that he would not tolerate nonsense from any quarter and would countermand the poll in any constituency at any time, right up to the declaration of the result, if there were any irregularities. He actually did so, in the first round, to enforce greater discipline and caution in the second and third rounds. His stern stewardship paid off.

The campaign was, however, marred by the tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by an LTTE suicide bomber near Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu while electioneering. Despite a temporary postponement, the election process was completed by the third week of June, the Congress cashing in on the sympathy factor. The BJP canvassed stability. There was an anti-Mulayam wave in UP, which also went to the polls, and the BJP formed a government there under Kalyan Singh. The Congress emerged as the largest single party, thirty to fifty seats short of an absolute majority. It was able to form a government under P.V. Narasimha Rao with issue-based support from the Left, NF remnants and some smaller parties.

Rajiv Gandhi's brutal killing had deeply shocked the nation, coming after his mother's assassination. Though enveloped in controversy on many counts, he had begun to open up the country to new ideas,

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modern ways and bold reform. This mildly echoed the glasnost and perestroika (openness and reform) initiated by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev that was to trigger a global convulsion resulting in the collapse of world Communism and his own ouster, and the break up of the Soviet Union (1988-91).

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The Ram Janambhoomi movement was by no means dead. Its embers were fanned by the atavistic Hindu agenda set for the BJP by the VHP, Shiv Sena and its own hardliners. The Ayodhya controversy, stripped to its essentials, was not a religious issue. It was less a manifestation of piety than of political mobilisation through an appeal to religious sentiment. Certain leading Babri spokesmen had expressed willingness to share the site with a Ram mandir.

The VHP, however, insisted on locating the sanctum sanctorum of the temple directly under the central dome of the masjid which, it claimed, marked the precise site of Ram's birth. This was said to be linked not merely to religious sentiment but to national honour as well. The parallel cited was the restoration of the Somnath temple after Partition, with the active support of Sardar Patel. The difference, of course, was that Somnath lay in ruins. No other mosque or structure stood there; nor was the possession of the site under dispute. The Somnath parallel was, therefore, not relevant, and the Sardar himself had expressed unhappiness over the sequence of events in Ayodhya, in 1949, when miscreants broke into the masjid at dead of night to place the idols inside.

Addressing a press conference in Hardwar on 24 June 1990, on the occasion of a sant sammelan convened by the VHP, the president of the Ram Janambhoomi Mukti Yagna Samaj was reported as saying that 'after Independence, the Hindus too should feel free'. Further, 'if symbols of dependence were removed, Hindu-Muslim unity would increase'.

What these statements implied was that the Babri Masjid, by implication, invested all Muslim Indians—over 100 million at that time—with a burden of historical guilt for the real or imagined sins of a bygone ruler. Where does history begin? And what about the pre-history to that 'history', going back to even more indigenous and original actors? Therefore, to accept a doctrine of retrospective vicarious liability would mean the end of civil society and a redefinition of statehood, even citizenship, on the basis of hegemonistic revivalism, the very antithesis of democracy, plurality and secularism. This narrow definition of 'Indianness' and 'cultural nationalism' propounded by the

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Sangh Parivar from time to time rests, in the final analysis, on a distinction sought to be drawn between indigenous and so-called foreign faiths (Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism) that did not originate on whatever may be defined as Indian soil.

The Ayodhya issue had three other facets. The first related to the title to property, which is still before the court. The second pertained to the facts of history. The existence of the Babri Masjid was undisputed as also its date of construction, AD 1528. That it was constructed by demolishing an earlier Ram Janambhoomi temple on that very site is a matter of conjecture. The archaeological findings are inconclusive and only establish the Buddhist-Jain origins of the site. The third fact revolves around the proposition that, whatever its historicity, the belief that the Babri Masjid stood over the precise spot where Ram was born aeons ago is a matter of faith. If millions believe in something, that perception is a reality that cannot be dismissed.

Nevertheless, faith translated into a 'choice' between Ram and Babar, by spokesmen of the Parivar, posited a false choice. This ancient conundrum was answered by Jesus 2000 years ago in words that have not lost their import: 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is His'. Babar is an indestructible part of Indian history whereas Ram, vested with attributes of divinity, remains an everlasting inspiration to faith and culture. Babar, a mortal, was commemorated by a masjid built in his name at Ayodhya. Ram is eternal and lives in the hearts and minds of millions. To limit Ram, maryada purushottam, an avatar of Vishnu, to the narrow confines of some notional coordinates is surely to diminish the majesty and grandeur of the boundless and timeless godhead which is omnipresent. Therefore, Ram is not where Ayodhya is. Ayodhya and Ram Janambhoomi are where Ram lives—in the hearts of men. Hence the Ayodhyas in Myanmar and Thailand, as much as Ram rajya, are not places but an ideal. Celebrations in brick and mortar indeed have their relevance. But they are the least and not the ultimate essence of the Absolute.

Concerned at growing signs of communal polarisation over the Ayodhya issue, Nanaji Deshmukh, a respected, 'retired' RSS elder devoted to national reconstruction, suggested that a group of independent public figures get together to break the deadlock. Nani Palkhivala, Achyut Patwardhan, B.F.H.B. Tyabji, Ramachandra Gandhi, the Mahatma's grandson, Prabhash Joshi, editor of *Jansatta*, Delhi, and I agreed. Some others were to be contacted. The object was to canvass all concerned interests and, having understood the contending positions, suggest a fair and just via media that the country might accept.

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Armed with this mandate, Ramu Gandhi, Prabhash Joshi, and I met Hari Vishnu Dalmia, then head of the VHP, Mahant Advaidyanath, MP for Gorakhpur, and another Parivar leader, Toshniwal, at Dalmia's Delhi residence on 5 May 1991. The mahant set out the VHP position. He said that the Hindus had no country other than India and Nepal and that Ram, Krishna and Shiva were central to Hindu belief. Hence the strong attachment to Ram Janambhoomi, Krishna Janambhoomi (Mathura) and Kashi Vishwanath (Varanasi), all of which were uniquely venerated shrines that had been destroyed by Muslim conquerors who had erected mosques on these sites with the very stones and pillars of the edifices that had been ravaged. Some reparation had to be made for those hurts and wrongs through the restoration of those great symbols of faith.

The VHP was not seeking restoration of 3700 other Hindu shrines converted into mosques, but only of the 3 most significant Hindu places of worship. For Muslims, those sites had no comparable religious significance except as symbols of conquest and victory. To that extent they remained symbols of humiliation and shame for Hindus. The Muslim objective was to regain supremacy over India through demographic and other means. Appeasement of Muslims must end. Hindus must unite to restore Hindutva. Indian secularism favoured all but the Hindus. There was no secularism in any Muslim country—though Indonesia was accepted as an exception when its extant Hindu cultural heritage was mentioned. If Muslim artisans constructed effigies for Ram Lila, it was only a commercial transaction and not a cultural bond. Gandhi was strongly criticised for partitioning India and seeking to appease Muslims. The exodus of Pandits from Kashmir was cited, and if Muslims were not prepared to give up the Babri Masjid, then they too might be treated like the minorities in Kashmir.

In this context we asked why a formal settlement reached over the Krishna Janmasthan with the Shahi Masjid Idgah Trust, Mathura, on 12 October 1968 was now being reopened, even though a written 'Ikranama' had been registered. A property dispute had been amicably settled and each side had agreed to withdraw the cases filed against the other. Dalmia had no explanation and evaded the issue by saying that he had not seen the Mathura agreement.

Ramu Gandhi wondered if a compromise based on a higher level of tolerance might be possible. The demolition of the masjid would be the repetition of the alleged demolition of a Ram mandir, and that would be wrong. Relocation of the masjid would also keep alive the hurt felt by the Hindus and injure Muslim sentiments as well. In the circumstances, a solution might lie in architecturally dividing the Babri structure. The

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front portion where the deities had been installed and puja was currently being offered could be separated and restructured to remain a mosque. This would indicate both tolerance and unity. I suggested a variant: instead of a lateral partitioning, could the structure be partitioned longitudinally along the centre of the middle dome so that a temple and mosque might each occupy the space under the arches of the original structure. The entire complex could then be declared a national treasure or national monument.

These propositions were vehemently rejected by the VHP leaders as impractical and as perpetuating a wrong. I pointed out that much had happened in history worldwide for which the present generations could not be blamed. Many places of worship had been destroyed or converted as in Jerusalem and Istanbul. Even in India, Buddhist and Jain shrines had been destroyed or taken over during periods of Hindu revival. How far back would one go?

The failure to end cow slaughter was then cited by the VHP leaders as an example of Muslim insensitivity. When it was stated that cow slaughter was banned in J&K, a Muslim majority state, this was brushed aside as something done in the maharaja's time. Finally, the VHP leaders, barring one, left the room saying that they had wasted enough time on a fruitless discussion.

The 'Ayodhya Group'that had been engaged in the dialogue, with the addition of Pupul Jayakar and the Catholic archbishop, Angelo Fernandes, had two further meetings with the Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee (BMMCC) and a team of archaeologists. The Muslim leaders included Syed Shahabuddin (convenor, BAMC), Shafi Moonis (secretary general, Jamaat-i-Islami) and Syed Yusuf (editor of *Radiance*, the Jamaat weekly).

The Babri movement spokespersons said that no Muslim would be prepared to accept the relocation of the Babri Masjd as, according to Muslim tradition, the site where a mosque stands is consecrated ground. If, however, it was shown that a Ram Mandir had been demolished to build the Babri Masjid, then the Muslims would voluntarily vacate it, as it was haraam to occupy another's place of worship. The idea of partitioning the mosque in two halves was indignantly rejected. But Shahabuddin repeated a personal proposition that he was willing to commend to his supporters if acceptable to the VHP, namely, that the premises be partitioned along the low railing where the Ram chabootra stands, and a temple be built there, if desired, with separate entrances to each shrine. The land appurtenant to the mosque was waqf land and could be bought, sold or exchanged. In any event secularism must be

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strengthened as the only secure and democratic foundation of the Indian state.

The group next met the director general, archaeology, former DGs and others in the department, and Martand Singh, cultural director, INTACH. They explained that excavations in and around Ayodhya had revealed the remains of black brick pillar bases associated with temples. But while there was reasonable proof of the existence of a sixth century temple there (though not necessarily of a Ram temple) there was no evidence that it marked the exact site of Ram's birth. As the discussions proved infructuous, the group abandoned its efforts.

*

If the shilanyas pujas of 1990 left behind a trail of communal violence, Advani's rath yatra generated further tensions and there were serious riots in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. The BJP spokesmen claimed that the rath yatra had spread a message of national unity and understanding. The facts were otherwise. Communal fervour was aroused. Spears, trishuls and swords were brandished; tilak was applied in blood and an urn of blood was presented to Advani. Provocative slogans were raised. Some were possibly disowned, but the sponsors could not be absolved of responsibility for unleashing forces that they were unable to control.

Early in 1991, media reports attributed to various VHP-Parivar sources began appearing about the destruction of Hindu temples in J&K. With Kashmir then in turmoil, this suggested a dangerous communal polarisation that could destroy Kasmiriyat, the Valley's tradition of cultural and communal togetherness and harmony.

Nanaji Deshmukh pointedly brought these reports to my attention. Nanaji had worked closely with JP, and had helped build the Janata Party. He would visit the Gandhi Peace Foundation, off and on, which was how I got to know him fairly well. I asked him for an authentic list of temples or religious sites, which the RSS/VHP said had been currently damaged or destroyed and offered to investigate the matter by visiting Kashmir myself, if necessary. After some reminders, Nanaji gave me an authenticated list prepared by the RSS office in Jammu.

Armed with these lists, I had made inquiries of responsible persons in Delhi and Kashmir. The divisional commissioner, Kashmir, had ordered the Srinagar tehsildar to inquire into the matter, and he had submitted a report dated 9 March 1991, together with an album of photographs that I was able to access. I visited several temples myself in Srinagar, as well as the revered Mata Khir Bhawani shrine near

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Ganderbal and talked to the mahants, worshippers and people of the neighbourhood. I found that the dharamsalas attached to the temples had been occupied by the CRPF and other para-military forces, resulting in their being targeted by militants. Some had, consequently, sustained minor damage to their outer perimeter from occasional exchanges of fire. In all these cases, I was told that the CRPF and not the temples had been the primary target.

I wrote in *The Express* about what had emerged from my inquiries:

> The many reports and statements made with great emotion . . . about the large-scale desecration of Hindu places of worship in Kashmir is not true and amounts to self-serving propaganda or disinformation. Unfortunately, these reports have been accepted at face value and given further currency through public statements by important figures. That such reports have followed in the wake of the Ram Janambhoomi campaign and the flight of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley have vested them with a communal and not merely criminal background.
>
> One would have thought that when communal passions in the country are running high and Kashmir is plunged in an unprecedented crisis, the authorities would have acted swiftly to establish the facts . . . Regrettably, the government, whether in Srinagar or Delhi, has done nothing of the kind.
>
> Even if the government failed, why did not the media—print, radio and TV—investigate the allegations and publish the facts? Here again, there has been a sad failure.
>
> Hopefully, a more systematic and complete investigation will now be made and the findings published. How can Kashmiri Pandits be persuaded to return to the Valley if they keep being told that their temples are being destroyed? This is an extremely serious matter and not to be treated with somnolent indifference.

No sooner did the article appear than a series of letters to the editor and press statements followed. These sought to controvert my findings, citing other reports, and accused me of being part of the 'secular brigade', a 'pseudo-secularist' and an unabashed apologist for the fundamentalists in Kashmir. *The Express* carried my rejoinder, 'Kashmir Temples Unharmed'. I said that the pujari of more than one 'damaged' temple in Srinagar had told me that they had no knowledge of any temple in the city having been destroyed. I concluded that the mischievous whispering campaign being conducted was not religious but political. That was the tragedy—and the danger.

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Shabana Azmi commented on this matter citing my article, and was roundly criticised by Shatrugan Sinha's wife, Poonam who, curiously, alleged that Verghese had been taken around the Srinagar temples 'by none other than the militants themselves'!

Early in 1993, the BJP secretary and MP, Madan Lal Khurana, denounced me in *The Tribune* for accusing the party of launching a disinformation campaign about the alleged vandalism of Hindu temples in Kashmir in order to justify the demolition of the Babri mosque. I advised the BJP leadership that it was no good repeating charges that had been comprehensively rebutted and that it was 'good environmentalism but bad politics to recycle garbage'. I sent a letter to *The Tribune* rebutting the charge.

> Like other critics of my writings and statements, he (M.L. Khurana) keeps harping on damage to temples in Kashmir in 1986, following the unlocking of the Babri Masjid gate . . . (This) is not in dispute and is an established and admitted fact . . . (Indeed Rajiv Gandhi had had Gul Shah, the J&K chief minister, dismissed on that count and had had the damaged temples repaired and restored.)
>
> Reference to 52 temples destroyed in Kashmir after December 6, 1992, though regrettably true, cannot bail them out. Attacks on any place of worship anywhere and at any time are disgraceful and must be condemned. Many mosques as much as temples in various parts of the country were attacked in the riots after December 6, as were gurdwaras in Delhi in November 1984. I have not seen the BJP rush to circulate countrywide lists of such gurdwaras and mosques. Why have temples in Kashmir alone been singled out? Surely the motive is obvious . . .
>
> Official records, however, show that of the 38 'religious places' damaged, 22 were temples and 16 mosques/dargahs/idgahs. And the causes of damage were identical—militant action and fire.

I have dwelt on the issue of the temples in Kashmir at considerable length only to bring out the underlying political motivation of the BJP and its partners in the Sangh Parivar. That was at the root of their desire to link Ram Janambhoomi with temples in Kashmir, the ethnic cleansing of Pandits and, indeed, with the larger Kashmir question. Further evidence of this was provided by the BJP president, Murli Manohar Joshi's Ekta Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir in early 1992, to

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secure the abrogation of Article 370 on the ground that it had engendered separatism (ignoring separatist demands at various times in states where Article 370 was not applicable).

Again, in his remarks before the NIC in November 1991, UP's BJP chief minister, Kalyan Singh, noted that the Ayodhya issue on which the council was deliberating was not as grave as the problem of separatism and terrorism in J&K. Ram Janambhoomi, he said, was a symbol of India's cultural heritage and national unity and was only problematic for pseudo-secularists and those nurturing vote-banks. He asserted that the mandir site was beyond the purview of any court as it was a matter of faith, which was the foundation of the mandate received by his government. As a concession to Muslim sentiment, L.K. Advani suggested that the 'mosque structure' might be 'respectfully shifted to (and relocated) at some distance' and a 'proper temple' built at the janamsthan. (By 2009, Kalyan Singh, feeling let down by the BJP, was singing a very different song in alliance with the BJP's sworn enemy, Mulayam Singh!)

The NIC was also informed that a new Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, had come into force. This provided for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it was on 15 August 1947. The Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid complex had been kept out of the purview of the act 'in view of its peculiar history, and pending court litigation'.

*

Advani's rath yatra set the stage for the tragic events that followed. He admitted that the yatra was a crusade against 'pseudo-secularism' and 'minorityism'.* The Ram Mandir went to the root of the Hindu psyche. 'I want a uniform civil code. I want Article 370 to be abrogated. I want cow protection. I want the minorities commission to be replaced by a human rights commission.' Here was Hindutva defined.

Fevered negotiations continued through 1992, and talks were resumed between the VHP and BMAC. Archaeological data was examined to establish the binding facts. S. Gopal, Romila Thapar and other leading historians in JNU came out with a closely argued tract, 'The Political Abuse of History', which rebutted the histories and theories being produced by the Parivar and other 'nationalist' scholars to prove that the Ram Janamsthan site was backed by historical evidence.

In his Independence Day address, Narasimha Rao declared that the Centre favoured the construction of a Ram Janambhoomi Mandir without

*Interview in *The Times of India*, 19 November 1991.

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demolishing or damaging the Babri Masjid. Further, in the absence of a negotiated settlement, the court verdict must be respected. Nonetheless, events moved on inexorably. The Supreme Court kept monitoring the situation. Late in October, the Dharam Sansad, an assembly of sants, announced the resumption of kar seva at the Ayodhya site on 6 December. On 1 December, it was subsequently revealed* that the governor, Satyanarayan Reddy, had reported a large but peaceful movement of kar sevaks, and the state government's repeated assurances of full protection for the disputed structure. He strongly advised against President's Rule as that could provoke violence and even result in damage to the masjid.

Even so the Government of India started moving para-military forces to Faizabad and the neighbourhood, within striking distance of Ayodhya, as a rapid reaction force. As many as 190 companies were deployed, for there were hints that more than symbolic activity might be expected on 6 December. An anxious nation waited for the fateful day.

The morning of 6 December witnessed a deceptive calm as tens of thousands of kar sevaks congregated to listen to the sants, sadhus and Parivar leaders. A group of 150 suddenly broke the cordon and started pelting stones at the police. This was the signal for a larger charge that carried the mob into the contested Babri structure. Within minutes, almost a hundred men had clambered on the dome. More joined the throng and, by early afternoon, an uncontrolled or uncontrollable mob intensified the demolition operation, armed with crowbars, pickaxes and shovels.

The police was supine and the para-military forces were immobilised in the absence of orders. The assembled BJP and VHP leaders—Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Vijaye Raje Scindia, S. Seshadri (RSS), Ashok Singhal (VHP) and Acharya Dharmendra—appeared torn between jubilation and helplessness. Such appeals as some of them made fell on deaf ears. Saffron flags and headbands and brilliant vermilion marks were everywhere, and cries of 'Jai Sri Ram!' rent the air. The well-prepared demolition squad, including Shiv Sainiks, seemed to be working to a carefully orchestrated plan. A traumatised nation watched the scene unfold on television with mingled horror and disbelief.

The state administration did not draw on the para-military forces the Centre had placed at its disposal. When one unit finally did move, it found the roads barricaded and progress impeded. The masjid had been razed by 4.30 p.m. Within hours, enough rubble had been cleared, a

*See P.V. Narasimha Rao, *Ayodhya: 6 December 1992* (Delhi: Penguin, 2006).

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makeshift structure constructed and the idols, temporarily removed for safety, were installed at the Ram Janamsthan site.

The news reports were graphic. To cite an eye-witness account by Ruchira Gupta in *Business India* (21 December 1992–3 January 1993):

> I am an Indian and a Hindu. But I felt ashamed to be both that day. And frightened for myself and my future . . . When I think of the day, many images crowd my mind—the orgasmic delight on Sadhvi Rithambara's face as she screamed *Ek jhatka aur do, Babri Masjid tod do* (One more push and bring the Babri Masjid down) . . .
>
> Another picture: the sheer helplessness on Advani's face, trapped as he was between the promise he had chanted . . . and the inability to distance himself from the mania he had unleashed . . . Rajmata Vijaye Raje Scindia weeping with joy as she hugged BJP MP Uma Bharati after the demolition . . . Amazement that Advani . . . did not utter a word to protest the open mockery of our judiciary, let alone walk off that terrace (on which the leaders were seated) . . . Uma Bharati embracing Murli Manohar Joshi. B.L. Sharma tenderly guarding the Ram Lalla idols removed from the mosque some minutes before it fell. Advani announcing the imminent arrival of the CRPF on stage and telling people to put up benches and lie down on the roads to block them . . . Sugar being distributed on the terrace . . . Advani eating it . . .
>
> Smoke on the horizon. From Muslim shops and jhuggis being burnt in Ayodhya. And Vivan Mehra our photographer, coming back absolutely shell-shocked. He had been beaten up by kar sevaks. Had to give up his camera and two rolls of film in exchange for his life . . .
>
> Later, one Telengi from Baramati, one of the first on the dome, explained to this correspondent, 'Yes. We were to climb the dome later (with the start of the kar seva) and (then) begin the demolition. But as the frenzy built up, I lost patience and ran up before the scheduled time. I could not wait. Everything had been planned. The only part where the plan went wrong was in the timing . . . The Supreme Court observer had been kept locked up in another camp office surrounded by hundreds of kar sevaks.

The Union Cabinet met that Black Sunday evening and resolved to dismiss Kalyan Singh and bring Uttar Pradesh under President's Rule. The proclamation was issued that same night. Communal riots had

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broken out in Ayodhya-Faizabad and Muslim homes were targeted. Media persons had been assaulted earlier in the day as the mischief-makers wanted to preserve their anonymity. An Army alert was sounded in several states as pent-up tensions exploded in anger and triumph. The kar sevaks were dispersed from Ayodhya. Several people were picked up for incitement to offence.

The RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, Jamaat-i-Islami and Islamic Sevak Sangh were banned under the Unlawful Activities Act. The CBI was asked to investigate the demolition offences while Justice M.L. Liberhan, a sitting judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court was named to head a commission of inquiry and report within three months. Forty-five incomprehensible extensions later, Liberhan's report was finally published in November 2009, a 1000-page tome signifying little.

Narasimha Rao announced that a masjid would be built alongside a Ram temple on lands to be acquired adjacent to the disputed site, which would be left undisturbed until the original title suit was decided. An ordinance was passed to that effect, only to be challenged by both sides. The Supreme Court found Kalyan Singh guilty of defying its orders and dishonouring his solemn undertaking to it that no harm would come to the masjid. He was sentenced to a token one-day's imprisonment. The BJP governments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal were dismissed.

Following the shilanyas puja at Ayodhya in October 1990, the Press Council had censured four Hindi dailies, *Aaj, Dainik Jagran, Swatantra Bharat* and *Swatantra Chetna*, for 'gross irresponsibility and impropriety and offending the canons of journalistic ethics' in their coverage. It also chastised the UP government for taking recourse to preventive and punitive action against the media to damp down coverage.

After the Babri Masjid demolition, the council appointed a fact-finding committee on media complaints of harassment. This found that simultaneously with the commencement of the destruction of the disputed structure, groups of kar sevaks carrying trishuls, swords and rods had vented their ire on media persons. Cameramen were told not to photograph or film anything and attempts were made to seize their cameras, film rolls and other equipment. Those resisting were beaten up. The action appeared pre-planned. And the police declined to intervene.

Days after the Babri Masjid was demolished, Advani said 6 December 1992 was 'the saddest day' of his life for three reasons. It had impaired the RSS/BJP's reputation for discipline. Secondly, the UP BJP's meticulous plan to construct the Ram temple without violating any law or court

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order had gone awry. Thirdly, 'the day's incidents would affect the BJP's overall image adversely and, to that extent (their) cause would suffer a temporary setback'. Later, on release from judicial custody, he said he was not ashamed that 'a dilapidated and abandoned structure' which was no longer a mosque, had fallen. Only one leading light of the Parivar kept somewhat aloof—Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The events of 6 December left behind a trail of bitterness and mistrust that further polarised estranged communities and sowed the seeds of revenge killings. This, in due course, spawned more radicalism, recruited the underworld as defenders of their faith and, fertilised by other events, mutated into terror. Almost twenty years later, the country still finds itself bloodied and tormented by the consequences.

The fallout was immediate. Ayodhya went up in flames that very evening. The fire spread to Aligarh, Agra, Varanasi and other places, far and near. There were adverse international reactions. Bombay erupted spontaneously with a Muslim backlash. The 6 days of rioting, until 12 December, left 222 dead and over 600 injured, with 50 more deaths being reported from other parts of Maharashtra. The Muslim community was anguished and hurt by what they had seen on TV screens, on 6 December—assurances betrayed and the police standing by, while a monument that had acquired deep symbolism was torn down by exulting vandals. Mobs of both communities came out on the streets. Many rioters were killed in police firing.

The Hindu right was on the boil and, under the lead of the Shiv Sena, launched systematic revenge killings in Mumbai between 6 and 15 January 1993. Smruti Koppikar of *The Statesman*, who assisted a fact-finding team of the Editor's Guild of India, wrote of a Hindu jihad or dharamyudh 'with Bal Thackeray as the supreme commander and a few criminal dons as his generals . . . forcing Bombayites into ghettoes of the mind'.

Elegant homes and slums were torched to benefit the real estate mafia. Underworld dons like Dawood Ibrahim, Karim Lala and Suresh or Pappu Thakur were active. Muslim stores were targeted across the city. Vigilante groups had marked out Muslim flats and homes which, thus identified, were attacked. Citizen's defence groups were formed in many localities by people of goodwill including a former general, Eric Vaz, and Julio Ribeiro, the highly respected retired police officer. They marked all flats and houses with the same symbols used by the vigilante groups to confuse the vandals. This was the beginning of Bombay's 'mohalla committees' which came to be cited as a model for others to adopt.

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An unofficial count of those who died in the disturbances, up to 18 January, was 600, while the official figure was 458. The numbers of the injured were far higher. Hundreds were reported missing. Many more fled the city. Sudhakar Rao Naik's government came out poorly, with internal dissension aggravating matters. Rumours were rife. An armada of Muslim mercenaries was reported approaching Bombay. The Shiv Sena called for maha-aarti at all temples to protest against Muslim worshippers spilling over into the streets during Friday namaz and the use of loudspeakers for the azaan call to prayer.

Justice B.N. Srikrishna, appointed to head a one-man commission of inquiry, encountered political hurdles and produced a report that was long disregarded. The Bombay holocaust was the beginning of another chapter of communal violence that gradually morphed into terror.

India was left bleeding, at war with itself, a victim of deep, self-inflicted wounds.

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13

THE REFORM ERA

On becoming prime minister in the summer of 1991, P.V. Narasimha Rao inherited the stewardship of a parlous economy with a looming balance of payments crisis, meagre reserves, a growing fiscal deficit and high inflation which called for a bail-out. The World Bank, IMF and donor nations were sympathetic but hard-nosed. They demanded a whole package of reforms with structural adjustment. The unspoken argument was that South Korea had done it earlier, and now China, Taiwan and the ASEAN five were on the way to becoming Asian tigers with booming economies. Why not India?

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and its CIS partners were busy dismantling their rigid centrally-planned economies in favour of market-led growth. Not all managed the transition equally well.

In China, Deng Xaioping was denounced by the old guard as a 'capitalist-roader', but persevered in building what he called 'market Socialism with Chinese characteristics', starting with the east coast, which offered the greatest promise, leaving the western provinces for later. The withering away of world Communism, barring a few hard-core outposts, left an ideological vacuum that market forces readily filled. Riding on the crest of a communications revolution that facilitated capital flows, globalisation became the order of the day.

Narasimha Rao stepped into this new political environment at a moment when India too was ripe for change. Planning had laid a fairly sound foundation and ensured a measure of self-reliance. Yet the permit-licence raj had choked initiative and stunted growth. Technology inflows were limited and industry was unable to exploit economies of

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scale. Penal rates of taxation encouraged evasion and had fuelled a burgeoning black market, while high tariff barriers and quantitative restrictions on trade promoted smuggling. The parallel economy corrupted governance. Unemployment kept mounting and a third of the country was estimated to be living below the poverty line.

The options were few, but it took courage and vision to chart a new political and economic course at variance with what had come to be regarded as part of an almost inviolate Nehruvian consensus. Narasimha Rao had all but retired from active political life in 1991, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. He staged a comeback to lead the Congress (which had emerged as the largest single party, though short of an absolute majority), and was elected party leader despite not being a member of the Lok Sabha. Andhra's pride in a 'native-born son' rising to head the Union government resulted in his being unopposed by the rival Telugu Desam, and he was elected from Nandyal (in a by-election), by a massive margin of half-a-million votes. PVR, as he was known, was an erudite man, something of a linguist, and had a characteristic pout that made him the cartoonist's delight.

The Indian economy was in deep peril and in danger of defaulting on its international payments. Not an economist himself, Rao went outside party ranks to induct a distinguished scholar-bureaucrat as his finance minister. Dr Manmohan Singh was a Professor at the Delhi School of Economics before he joined the government to serve successively as economic adviser; secretary, economic affairs; governor of the Reserve Bank; secretary general of the UN South-South Commission and member, Planning Commission, apart from stints with the World Bank and the University Grants Commission. This added up to a formidable CV but did not make him a politician. It was here that a brilliant partnership came into play: Manmohan Singh, charted a new course for the beleaguered economy, prioritising the necessary reforms and giving them shape, with Narasimha Rao providing the solid political ballast that this required. The Cabinet had to be carried along and then Parliament, against the strong criticism of the Left and other traditional Nehruvian socialists.

Manmohan Singh was later to say that he warned the prime minister of possible setbacks and pitfalls but urged a bold departure, which would convert the current economic crisis into an opportunity. Structural adjustments were being pressed, but Manmohan Singh refused to be hustled, preferring to move at his own pace in a bid to lift the economy and release the latent innovative and entrepreneurial genius, which he believed was there to harness. Presenting his budget in Parliament, in

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1994-95, he quoted Victor Hugo's famous statement, 'No power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come'.

Narasimha Rao captured the essence of the new economic policy in his foreword to the Eighth Five-Year Plan, 1992-97. In this turbulent world, he said,

> . . . our policies must also deal with changing realities. Our basic policies have stood us in very good stead and now provide us the opportunity to respond with flexibility to the new situation, so that we can work uninterruptedly towards our basic aim of providing a rich and just life for our people.
>
> Planning has been one of the pillars of our policies since Independence, and our present strengths derive from its achievements. There is today recognition that in many areas of activity, development can be best ensured by freeing them of unnecessary controls and regulations and withdrawing state intervention. At the same time, we believe that the growth and development of the country cannot be left entirely to the market mechanism. The market can be expected to bring about 'equilibrium' between 'demand'—backed by purchasing power—and 'supply', but it will not be able to ensure a balance between 'need' and 'supply'. Planning is necessary to overcome such limitations of the market mechanism. Planning is necessary for macro-economic management, for taking care of the poor and downtrodden who are mostly outside the market system and have little asset endowment. It is thus not a choice between the market mechanism and planning; the challenge is effectively to dovetail the two so that they are complementary to each other.

The focus of planning was on human development through enhanced employment, population control, universal education, primary healthcare, provision of safe drinking water, and agricultural growth and diversification. Private industry was to be given its head and the public sector restricted in the main to hi-tech investment and essential infrastructure. Correcting the fiscal imbalance and stimulating exports were set out as major objectives. The Plan was geared to 'managing the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-led economy without tearing apart the nation's socio-economic fabric'. (See Appendix 4 for my own take on the national scene and my suggestions for steering the country on a dynamic new path.)

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During Chandrashekhar's regime, Yashwant Sinha as finance minister had had to hypothecate some of India's gold reserves to Swiss banks as collateral for bank lending. The selling of the family's silver, as it were, epitomised the extremes to which the country had been reduced. There was a very high fiscal deficit of 8.5 per cent of the GDP and an equally daunting balance of payments deficit with foreign exchange reserves down to around $1 billion, equivalent to roughly two weeks' imports. Inflation was at 13 per cent. There was little time to lose and the government launched its reform programme with Manmohan Singh's first budget for 1991-92, with each subsequent budget rolling out further reform measures.

The liberalisation programme entailed reforms pertaining to de-regulation of business, opening up to foreign investment, reform of the capital market and of the trade and tariff regime. The rupee was devalued by about 20 per cent in 1991 and was floated the following year, introducing partial convertibility. The public sector was opened up, and substantive investments were committed to building infrastructure. Tax evasion was tackled by reducing the tax rates and through a one-time scheme for legalising hidden incomes if declared, subject to a levy on part of the hoarded wealth. The object of the amnesty was to divert black money into legitimate investments, and to augment revenues through better compliance and collections on the basis of lower rates. A modified value-added tax or MODVAT was introduced, bringing some new manufacturing sectors and services into the tax net. The reform of public sector enterprises was also undertaken, to cut out the dead wood through selective disinvestment.

Tariffs were reduced from an average of 85 per cent to 25 per cent and quantitative restrictions relaxed. Foreign direct investment was given a boost and the limits of foreign investment in joint ventures enhanced from 40 to 51 per cent and even 100 per cent in certain priority sectors. A tangled tariff regime was rationalised and procedures for FDI licensing similarly simplified, with automatic approvals within prescribed limits. The results were quite dramatic. Foreign investment under all heads rose from $132 million in 1991-92 to $5.3 billion over the next 4 years, and de-regulation curtailed industrial licensing to 18 industries.

The National Stock Exchange was inaugurated in 1994.

The monopoly of the Department of Telecommunications was ended in 1994 with the enunciation of the new National Telecom Policy. (In Indira Gandhi's time, when getting a telephone connection was not easy and there were complaints galore about the abominable telephone

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services, the joke went that the prime minister was unable to sack her telecommunications minister, C.M. Stephen, as she simply could not ever get him on the phone!) Stimulus was given to private investment by opening up the field. Outsourcing, joint ventures and the privatisation of various hitherto closed sectors followed steadily over the years: roads, power, ports, oil and gas, banking, insurance, broadcasting, defence supplies.

Increased emphasis was placed on better management of the environment with regard to forest conservation, mapping and preservation of bio-diversity, wildlife protection, wasteland reclamation, water and air quality, river ecology, coastal area management, sanitation and urbanisation. An environmental action programme (EAP) was put in place in 1993.

The New Economic Programme brought about a substantial improvement in the balance of payments, and exports grew at the rate of 20 per cent in 1993-94, despite some difficulties and delays in adjusting to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the consequent disruption of the rupee-rouble trade. Small investors were brought into the capital market through investment in mutual funds. Employment expanded. Food production rose to 191 million tonnes, with corresponding increases in the production of milk, fruit and vegetables, and food stocks stood at 31 million tonnes. The percentage of the population below the poverty line declined from 25 per cent in 1987-88 to below 19 per cent in 1993-94 (on the basis of an earlier matrix). Industrial growth picked up and GDP growth rose from less than 1 per cent to which it had plummeted in 1990-91 to a healthy 6.2 per cent in 1995-96.

India was also impacted by changes in the international trade regime brought about by the reform of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) through the so-called Dunkel proposals, named after the GATT secretary general. This, for the first time, brought matters of Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and the complex and arcane regime of patents, Trade Related Investment Matters (TRIMS), within the purview of GATT.

Though some issues yielded agreements, others remained inconclusive despite further rounds of negotiation. These impinged on developing nations in particular, and touched on issues such as agricultural subsidies and genetically modified seeds, which continue to be matters of controversy. Without going into any of these technical issues, suffice it to note that there was fear of and opposition to being entrapped by globalisation and, thereby, losing a certain measure of freedom of

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action, and being dictated to by global market forces over which India would have little control.

International trade and financial integration have proceeded apace with the continuing satellite-computer-telecommunications and technological revolution. Employment with multinational corporations and the migration of workers and super-skilled personnel have spawned large national diasporas such as the Indian community in North America, Britain, West Asia, South-east Asia and Australia, apart from the progeny of the earlier migrants—mostly indentured labour in Africa, South-east Asia and the Pacific and the Caribbean. These overseas Indians send home large remittances. With outsourcing and specialisation based on locational and other comparative advantages, India also imports many raw materials, complex products and assemblies from diverse and distant sources from around what Thomas Friedman has called the Flat Earth.

Not everybody welcomes this trend, though losses on the swings yield gains on the roundabout. It is the balance that matters. The fact is that India has always been something of a globalised society in terms of culture, commerce and technological exchange. It was driven to isolation as a result of Western dominance and has now, later than many other de-colonised nations, opened up to the world.

If there was a clear inability to make significant headway in an area of concern it was in the rolling back of subsidies on food and fertilisers and in the pricing of electricity and water. While some subsidies could be justified, others were just political giveaways to win or retain political support. Ultimately the poor lost out as the gains were collared by those with more social and political clout.

Whatever the shortcomings, there had been a remarkable turnaround by 1996. The Cassandras were proved wrong. Economic reforms had begun to deliver. India mattered. It was becoming an investment destination. Tourism had picked up. This was now 'Incredible India'. The next decade was to see even higher rates of growth (8 to 9 per cent) and the steady development of the IT, pharmaceutical, automotive and steel sectors. With this, India emerged as a potential economic powerhouse and the world's fourth largest economy in purchasing power parity terms. There was speculation that it would overtake Japan, and move to third place after the US and China by 2030, or thereabouts, if current trends persisted. A large and growing middle class had become a key driver in the country's progress.

Beyond the euphoria, there was, however, a flip side. Shining India was juxtaposed with Suffering India. This was reflected in agricultural stagnation, dismal social indices, especially with regard to education

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and health, 'jobless growth' (with the thrust on capital intensive development), regional imbalances, a lack of urban renewal, infrastructural bottlenecks, some worrying environmental indicators, unabated corruption, a rising crime graph, continuing gender discrimination, and a host of other evils making for social violence.

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Militancy in Punjab, Assam and J&K was a continuing source of worry. Terrorist groups in Punjab, as in J&K, were afraid of truly fair and free polls and were determined to thwart the restoration of the political process. In Punjab, their bluff was called with the holding of Assembly and local elections through 1992, ending five years of President's Rule.

Normalcy, however, was not easily restored even thereafter. The terrorists had enraged the police rank and file by targeting their families, and K.P.S. Gill, who had taken charge as director general of police, cracked down hard on them. The militants started losing ground, but continued to receive arms and assistance from Pakistan. Pakistan also harboured the Khalistan Commando Force, the Babbar Khalsa and the International Sikh Youth Federation. It was estimated that these armed gangs were holding over 1540 AK-47s and 100 rocket launchers and machine guns, and were infiltrating into Punjab through the Rajasthan and Gujarat borders.

There was a certain licence to use all means to break the terrorists. Soon disconcerting reports of encounter killings, torture and custodial deaths began to emerge. A system of bounties, gallantry awards and promotions linked to the killing of terrorists further aggravated these negative trends, and soon had human rights groups and the general public agitating for redress. Nonetheless, by the latter part of the decade, terror in Punjab was a thing of the past, though the issues of Chandigarh and water sharing still dog Punjab-Haryana relations.

The turbulence in Jammu and Kashmir continued. The JKLF, which sought independence, was the first to take up arms in 1989-90. It suffered heavy casualties and was all but abandoned by Islamabad which backed the Jamaat-i-Islami's Hizbul Mujahideen, which favoured J&K's acceding to Pakistan. Even so, fearful of any one group becoming too powerful and asserting an independent line, the ISI sponsored a large number of other *tanzeems*, such as the Islami Jamait Tulba, the Muslim Students' Federation, the Islamic Student's League and the J&K People's League. Each group had its own leaders and territorial 'beats' and having trained, armed and funded these formations, the ISI orchestrated their depredations beyond the Valley to Doda and other parts of Jammu.

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There were deliberate efforts to target Hindus and Sikhs so as to provoke a communal backlash, but this tactic singularly failed in view of J&K's long sufi-rishi tradition of tolerance and togetherness. Then, as the local militants began to tire, Pakistan sponsored and infiltrated 'guest militants' into India, from POK and the Northern Areas, Pakistan proper and from Afghanistan, West Asia and other hotbeds of rising Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, many of these were battle-hardened veterans of the Afghan war who, as the tide turned there, began to seek pastures new in Kashmir. This was seen as part of the great jihad in the cause of establishing an Eastern Caliphate. Right from the start, mosques and seminaries were made the hub of congregational indoctrination, especially around Friday prayers.

Pakistan's proxy war in J&K was intended to tie down a substantial part of the Indian Army and para-military forces in Punjab and J&K. This war of attrition, or 'bleeding India with a thousand cuts' as famously embodied in Pakistan's military doctrine, was supplemented by using and provoking human rights violations as a potent instrument for demoralising and shaming the Indian security forces, and turning the anger of the people and the censure of the international community on them. Thus it was that in 1992 and 1993, Pakistan launched a blistering human rights offensive against India in the US, UK, the European Union, and before the UN Human Rights Commission, the Islamic Conference, and in every other conceivable forum where it could get a hearing.

Undoubtedly, there were human rights excesses, but vigilant Indian human rights groups and the media exposed them. They were thereafter regurgitated and embroidered by Pakistan and by Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the Boston Physicians for Human Rights, among others. Many incidents were exaggerated, and some fabricated, or based on hearsay and anecdotal evidence and taken at face value even when retailed by the most unlikely actors. Equally, such narratives were not placed in context and lacked balance, being unmindful of ground realities and the tactical and strategic uses to which alleged human rights atrocities were being put as a weapon of psychological warfare.

Unfortunately, the government did not help matters by shutting out international human rights organisations and the ICRC from J&K, though some of their members found their way in clandestinely as tourists. Foreign media were, however, free to report out of J&K even though some had allowed themselves to be led off on conducted tours by militant 'guides', and filed dubious reports without due verification. As always, sensation made news.

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The Amnesty 1992 report on torture, rape and deaths in custody covered much more than J&K or Punjab. But it erred, as did many others, including Indian human rights activists, in asserting that the wide powers given to search without warrant, arrest and shoot-to-kill under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act enforced in J&K, Punjab and Assam 'have been interpreted by the security forces as licence to torture and kill with impunity'. As I wrote at the time, this betrayed a lack of understanding of ground realities in a situation of mindless terror that had resulted in the destruction of the due process of law. It was terror that had provoked recourse to special powers and not special powers that had created violent lawlessness. Yet safeguards and reviews were necessary to ensure that special powers were not misused after the emergency, which had necessitated their imposition in the first place, had receded. It was equally untrue and unfair to generalise that in J&K 'rape is practised as part of a systematic attempt to humiliate and intimidate the local population during counter-insurgency operations'. My own investigation of the alleged horrendous mass rape by a military unit in Kunan Poshpora in Kupwara district had disproved that charge.

Physicians for Human Rights published its report early in 1993, and charged counter-insurgency forces with committing human rights violations with impunity. It also warned grotesquely 'of a medical catastrophe unless the government grants immediate access to the ICRC to provide medical and humanitarian relief for civilians in Kashmir'. The report spoke of ambulances being intercepted and prevented from performing their medical missions, of hospitals being raided and doctors and patients held at gun point, of firing in hospitals, of injured patients being arrested, of attrition of health professionals and the consequent lack of health services especially in rural areas, and shortages of essential drugs. They claimed that the crisis was a product of the government's alleged failure to abide by international law.

The facts were most often otherwise, as an official rebuttal documented. Ambulances had been used to ferry terrorists or weapons and explosives, or to carry injured militants to hospitals where some would be sheltered as patients or even bandaged and placed on life support systems to evade detection. Hospitals had been used as terrorist sanctuaries and medical staff had been intimidated into doing the bidding of gun-toting militants. A large number of lethal weapons had been recovered from Srinagar hospitals. With rural bridges and culverts being blown up, communications had been disrupted and the transportation of medical and other essential supplies affected. Schools had been forced to close down and welfare activities like immunisation obstructed, sometimes

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on account of fundamentalist objections to programmes like family planning. The exodus of many professionals, Muslim and Hindu, from the Valley had denuded the medical services of personnel at all levels.

Asia Watch did not stop there. Its Washington director tried to put pressure on the IMF to 'delay its lending activity to India' until human rights issues were appropriately addressed. The House Sub-Committee on Asia and Pacific Affairs of the US Congress was also approached, to suspend military assistance and military sales to India.

Much was made of India's failure to adhere to Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. This states that 'in the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, there are prohibitions against violence to life and person, outrages upon personal dignity and violation of medical neutrality. It applies to civilians and combatants who have laid down their arms or are rendered hors de combat by sickness or injury. But what was being seen in India was not armed conflict in the recognised sense as between known, uniformed adversaries, but the State warding off brutal terror by faceless men, owning no responsibility or accountability to any legitimate authority, and determined to defy and defeat the due process of law. The criminal justice system had broken down with magistrates, lawyers and witnesses under dire threat if they stepped out of line. The media was muzzled by the gun and a leading Srinagar editor confessed to me that he functioned with a pistol at his head. Fear ruled. There was safety in silence as walls had ears.

While not seeking to gloss over human rights violations in India, which must surely be condemned and curbed, one could not but help notice an element of double standards in Western postures, with human rights being used as a foreign policy instrument, while soft-pedalling, ignoring or even justifying horrors in which they themselves were involved—Indo-China, and the expulsion of the Chagos Islanders from their homelands in the British Indian Ocean Territories to make way for the US strategic air base at Diego Garcia, Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, to cite only some examples. Not to mention events in Iraq and Afghanistan, more recently, with massive fatalities being routinely passed off as 'collateral damage'. Now that terror has struck Western homelands, relatively marginally as yet, India's terror responses are sometimes cited as 'soft'. How times change!

In 1992, the government had released from detention five well-known Kashmiri political figures and also offered an amnesty to militants who surrendered. One of these was Kuka Parray. Disillusioned with the underground terror outfits, he resolved to fight them. With some signs

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of the government gaining the upper hand in J&K, there was a feeling in certain quarters that it might be desirable to hold elections there and restore popular rule. The prospect alarmed secessionist forces who redoubled their efforts to subvert any appeal to the people. In October 1993, Harkat-ul Mujahideen elements tried to wrest control of the environs of the Hazratbal shrine, a JKLF stronghold. A number of armed persons entered the shrine, to which the security forces promptly laid siege, in a bid to capture them. As a result of back channel discussions the thirty-one-day siege was lifted and the militants let out. They surrendered their weapons, were interrogated and then quietly released after some time. A potentially explosive situation had been defused, and any latent mischief nipped in the bud.

Pakistan kept trying to foment more trouble. The Kul Jamaat-e-Hurriyat (All Party Hurriyat Conference or APHC) was promoted in 1993. It was composed of seven former political formations and some twenty-five other bodies—human rights, bar, trade and professional associations and women's groups. The conglomerate espouses very divergent positions, its members periodically turning on one another to the extent that most sought and were given security cover by the government, for long periods, against their own friends. The Hurriyat, whether individually or collectively, has little or no influence outside the Valley, or even in all of the Valley, and is widely seen as Pakistan's cat's paw.

The year 1995 saw the climax of the intifada in J&K. The famous shrine of Charar-e-Sharif in the pilgrim town of Charar, commemorating Kashmir's patron saint, Sheikh Nooruddin, a proud symbol of the sufi-rishi tradition, was torched by Mast Gul, a Pakistani terrorist, and his companion, Abu Jindal, an Afghan, who had occupied the town with a band of Harkat-ul-Ansar marauders. Kashmir was shocked and grieved. Abu Jindal was arrested but Must Gul escaped, to be accorded a hero's welcome in Pakistan.

Later that same year, a new group calling itself Al Farhan, abducted six foreign tourists near Pahalgam. In exchange for them, it sought the release of the jailed Harkat-ul-Ansar terrorists, and even went to the extent of beheading one of the tourists, a Norwegian. Amarnath yatris and Israeli visitors were attacked, and French and Swedish engineers kidnapped from the Dul Hasti and Uri hydro-electric projects, respectively. The list of terror attacks kept growing, but the local populace was quite clearly disenchanted and disgusted by the mindless killings that brought reprisals and more grief.

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In the midst of all these events, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in Geneva decided to send out a mission to India and Pakistan, in August 1993, to look at the human rights situation in Kashmir which, it said, was causing international concern. The team included jurists from the UK (Sir William Goodhart, who authored the report), Brazil, Uganda and Thailand. The ICJ was the first international organisation to be authorised by the Indian government to visit J&K.

The result was disappointing. After spending fourteen days in Delhi, Srinagar, Jammu, Islamabad and Muzaffarabad, the team set out its understanding of the history, background and genesis of the Kashmir conflict and the current situation. It published its findings after taking into account critiques made to the preliminary draft by the governments of India and Pakistan. It cited published reports, by Indian and international sources, of 'misconduct' by (Indian) government forces and personnel under the headings of extra-judicial executions, killings of non-combatants, torture, disappearances, rape, assault, destruction of property and theft, constraints upon personal and family life, and other concerns.

In the section on rape, it referred to the 'most serious allegation' relating to the incident at Kunan Poshpora which I had investigated. The ICJ noted that a committee of the independent Press Council of India 'led by the distinguished journalist B.G.Verghese (but not including any woman), concluded that the incident was a hoax set up to frame the Army. The ICJ mission interviewed Mr Verghese and are satisfied that he is an honourable man who would not have announced a conclusion which he did not believe to be true. However, the Press Council report has been widely criticised ... If the incident was entirely a hoax, it was a remarkably elaborate one which the India authorities assisted by failing to carry out a quick and effective investigation. The ICJ mission therefore concludes that, while mass rape at Kunan Poshpora may not have been proved beyond a doubt, there are very substantial grounds for believing that it took place'.

The ICJ further found that 'the alienation felt by the general population against occupation by Indian troops was ubiquitous during the visit by the ICJ mission and this was linked with the issue of self-determination as the sine qua non for peace in the Kashmiri setting'. The militants and their Pakistani handlers were also criticised. The critique of POK and the Northern Areas was damning (though many facts were muffed) but no larger conclusions were drawn from this as the principal focus of the mission was J&K and the Valley in particular. It did, however, state that 'Pakistan has no right in international law to supply material assistance to the militants in Kashmir. The Government of Pakistan should take

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steps to prevent the supply of weapons, finance and training facilities to the militants by non-government sources as well as discontinue any supply from official sources'. Further, 'the inhabitants of the Northern Areas should be given full democratic rights under a constitution. The Constitution of Azad Kashmir should be amended to remove restrictions on human rights'.

The real mischief of the ICJ's recommendations came in the tail. It examined the evolution of the concept of (the inalienable right to) self-determination as enunciated in the UN Charter and subsequent UN resolutions. Until the 1960s the right to self-determination was seen almost exclusively as part of the process of decolonisation. Thereafter, its ambit was restated in the International Covenants on Civil and Political and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Vienna Declaration adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), and was sought to be interpreted more widely in some quarters. But in every case without exception, each new international formulation carried the caveat that 'this shall not be construed as authorising or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states'. The Government of India too had in 1976 stated, when the International Covenants came into force, that 'the words "right to self-determination" appearing in Article 1 apply only to peoples under foreign domination and that these words do not apply to sovereign independent states or to a section of people or nation—which is the essence of national integrity'.

Despite these caveats, the ICJ mission concluded that 'the people of J&K had a right at the time of Partition, to decide whether to accede to India or Pakistan. That right was recognised both by the Government of India and the UN. That right is fully in accordance with the conventional principle of self-determination, since it arises out of the right of an entity emerging from foreign domination to choose for itself which of the successor states to join. (A comparable case was the British Cameroons, where plebiscites were held to decide whether the area should join Nigeria or Cameroon.) The right is quite distinct from the much more debatable right of secession from an established independent state, and it does not constitute a precedent for the secession from India of any other part of its territories'.

The ICJ went on to argue that the right of self-determination had not been ended or abandoned by the Simla Agreement of 1972 (of which the people of J&K were not a part), or by the 1977 poll, howsoever fair and free, as 'accession to India was accepted, but as a fait accompli rather

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than a positive choice'. Two further points were made. 'It is now virtually certain that a majority vote of the state as a whole, given a choice between India and Pakistan, would be for Pakistan. But the Hindu majority areas of Jammu would never accept their transfer to Pakistan, and even if such a transfer did take place, it would simply reproduce the present problems in reverse.' Further, 'for the purpose of self-determination, the state must be regarded as containing not one but several peoples'. Therefore, 'for the reasons given above, it is essential that the right of (self-determination) should not be exercised by the State as a single unit (but as discrete territorial/ethnographic entities)'.

The Indian government tore into the ICJ report for coming to blatantly political and partisan conclusions. It upheld my findings on the alleged Kunan Poshpora rape, and backed this up with the findings of the Kashmir commissioner, Wahjahat Habibullah, and a subsequent police investigation. It noted the mission's failure to acknowledge that for Pakistan, so-called self-determination (denied to POK and the Northern Areas) meant 'pre-determination'. It also pointed out that the idea of dividing the united J&K on the basis of religious and even denominational labels (such as Sunni and Shia) sought to resurrect the pernicious two-nation theory which, if taken seriously, 'could have the potential for a revisitation of the holocaust of communal violence that accompanied the partition of the sub-continent, apart from being an antithesis to the whole concept of plural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious states'. The tendentious ICJ report sank without a trace.

With the period of Governor's Rule drawing to a close in 1994, thoughts began to turn to holding elections in the state. There were those who felt that the security situation was still troubled. This view was upheld by the chief election commissioner, Seshan, who became something of a folk hero in J&K and Pakistan for asserting his institutional independence against Delhi's alleged diktats. Seshan was invited to visit Pakistan shortly thereafter, and was received with much acclaim. On his return home, he regaled audiences with the quip that he had been told that Madhuri Dixit, the film star, and he were so popular in Pakistan that they would be returned victorious from any constituency in the country from which they chose to stand. Having said that, Seshan coyly added that modesty forbade him from revealing the order in which the two names, his and Madhuri Dixit's, had been mentioned!

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Narasimha Rao left his mark on India's foreign relations by establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel. This long overdue measure was

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widely welcomed and, contrary to what was feared, scarcely impacted on Indo-Arab relations. It corrected a major anomaly in India's foreign policy. Rao also laid the foundation for what was to become India's Look East policy that was initially aimed at drawing nearer ASEAN (which encompassed some of the fastest growing economies in the world).

Whatever his successes abroad and the kudos he received for the economic reforms he initiated, Rao was dogged at home by corruption charges. The first of these was that he had bribed members of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and some other MPs to vote with the Congress, in July 1993, on a no-confidence motion. One of the named JMM members turned approver and though the scandal rocked Delhi, Rao was not formally charged until he demitted office. He was convicted by a special court in 2000, but cleared two years later by an appellate authority.

There followed the Harshad Mehta and Lakhubhai Pathak scandals and the St Kitts' forgery case. Harshad Mehta or the Big Bull rose from rags to riches by playing the Bombay stock market to earn the sobriquet 'Sultan of Dalal Street'. Mehta was charged with diverting into his account 500 crore rupees worth of fraudulently obtained Maruti Udyog Limited 'units' of the Unit Trust of India. In April 1992, the State Bank of India asked him to return the 500 crores he had borrowed and used to play the market. The money was not forthcoming. When Mehta was subsequently arraigned and jailed for masterminding stock market scams totalling Rs 5000 crores, he alleged that he had paid Narasimha Rao a crore. These were vague but murky charges, which nonetheless caused a considerable stir. In the Lakhubhai Pathak case, it was said that the 'godman' Chandraswami, using his clout with Rao, defrauded this UK-based pickle king of a sum of $100,000 in 1983, by offering to facilitate a contract to supply newsprint and paper pulp to India. Lakhubhai made a down payment to Chandraswami but the contract never materialised.

Then, there was the St Kitts scandal. Rao was charged, along with Chandraswami, with forging a document showing that Ajeya Singh had opened an account in a bank in the Caribbean island of St Kitts and deposited $21 million in it, naming his father, V.P. Singh, the then prime minister, as the beneficiary. This canard was spread to tarnish Singh's image. Rao was ultimately acquitted in all these cases but they scarred his image and caused him great anguish. Indian politics had become murky.

With human rights increasingly engaging international attention, the

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Commonwealth associations for law, legal education, medicine and journalism got together to launch a Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) in London with an international advisory committee headed by the former Canadian external affairs minister, Flora Macdonald. I was invited to join the advisory committee, which I did, and began to take steps to set up an office in Delhi.

The first order of business of the advisory committee was to commission a report on human rights standards for the Commonwealth with the emphasis on democracy, development and social and environmental concerns. What emerged was a document, 'Put Our World to Rights', which was presented by CHRI to the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM), at Harare, in 1991. This exercise has been repeated at subsequent CHOGMs as a device to monitor and advocate human rights in the Commonwealth.

Quite early on it was decided to move the CHRI executive director's office from London to Delhi. CHRI has since become a truly dynamic organisation with a wide national and international network, and has focused on police reforms, prison reforms and the right to information, for which it has earned deserved recognition under the leadership of its director, Maja Daruwala, aided by a dedicated international staff and a strong executive committee, which I currently chair.

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Indian politics was undergoing a transformation. The Congress defeat in 1996 saw the exit of Narasimha Rao from the post of prime minister. The BJP had emerged as the largest single party though lacking an absolute majority. The President, Shankar Dayal Sharma, thereupon invited Atal Behari Vajpayee to form a government. This he did, and was sworn in on 16 May 1996. The opposition, however, cobbled together an alternative which came into being under Deve Gowda, then Janata Dal chief minister of Karnataka, who had put together a third front of non-Congress, non-BJP parties, called the United Front. It managed to garner some additional support in the new House and with thirteen parties on board, challenged Vajpayee. The BJP government quit within thirteen days, and Deve Gowda switched roles, resigning as chief minister to take office as prime minister on 31 May. He was, by no means, a front runner, and though a one-time MP was better known in state politics. He was, as he put it, a 'humble farmer', with a diploma in civil engineering, and was propelled into high office as the least unacceptable among all contenders.

Deve Gowda's tenure was brief and not particularly eventful, although

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he did turn his attention to some of the long-standing conflicts that were bleeding the country. While Narasimha Rao had said 'the sky is the limit' for J&K autonomy within India, Deve Gowda spoke of 'maximum autonomy' for the state. He also announced an economic package for J&K, and inaugurated the Uri hydro-electric project.

Parliamentary elections were held in J&K in mid-1996 in the face of a militant-Hurriyat boycott call and threats of extreme violence against candidates, voters and election staff. Defying the terrorists, nearly 2.1 million people voted, with participation varying from 35 to 55 per cent in the Valley and Doda. The elections were won by the National Conference and Farooq Abdullah returned to office.

In the North-east, the Assam Accord had aroused great expectations, but progress on the ground was slow for a variety of reasons. National attention had also been diverted to several immediate issues. The influx from Bangladesh continued. ULFA, the Assam movement's separatist group, reeling from the Army's Operation Rhino, sought sanctuary in Bangladesh and gradually cosied up to the regime, which obviously found uses in such cohabitation. From its hideouts across the border, the ULFA formed alliances with other Indian and expatriate insurgent groups, and later penetrated southern Bhutan, where it established bases from which it could regroup and make forays into Assam. Some ULFA cadres surrendered but they took to crime when they were not being employed as political storm troopers. The promise of accelerated development contained in Clause 7 of the Assam Accord had not made the desired headway, and other parts of the North-east were also restive.

Deve Gowda decided to review the problems of the North-east, and set up a high level commission (headed by S.P. Shukla, Member, Planning Commission) to examine the situation and report to him. The Shukla Commission, of which I was a member, was basically entrusted with two issues: clearing the backlog in regard to providing minimum basic services; and providing the North-east with a sound infrastructural base for rapid development. Its report 'Transforming the North-east' examined these issues and came up with a blueprint for action to meet two additional deficits: the political deficit and a two-way deficit of understanding between the region and the rest of the country, which compounds the other problems. It also considered how best to augment the region's own resources by stimulating more rapid growth with additional private investment, Indian and foreign, within a well-defined framework.

We placed the development of the Seven Sisters of the North-east—

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now eight, with the addition of Sikkim, though, mistakenly, not North Bengal and the Darjeeling-Gorhka Hills Area—in several concentric circles. First, the local community; next the autonomous councils/states; third, the region as a whole; beyond that, the greater Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) resource region; and finally, the larger world of South-east Asia and South-west China as the North-east is truly India's cultural and economic bridgehead to these fast-growing economies.

The recent MOU with Myanmar restoring border trade, and the just-concluded Ganges Treaty with Bangladesh, presented new opportunities that merited mutually beneficial exploitation. New concepts such as a South Asia Growth Triangle (embracing eastern and north-eastern India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan), a Bay of Bengal Triangle and a Bangladesh-South-west China-Eastern India-Myanmar Quadrangle born of the so-called Kunming Initiative, offered opportunities for potentially productive partnerships, in all of which the North-east would be a nodal player. We also emphasised that peace and development in the region were inextricably linked.

The commission travelled throughout the North-east, and met a whole range of people drawn from the government, security services, industry and the rural sector, as also professionals and academics. Its report was submitted to the prime minister in just over four months. Subsequent changes in government possibly came in the way of a more purposeful and vigorous implementation of the recommendations.

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The government managed to weather a storm in October 1997 when Kalyan Singh's BJP government in Uttar Pradesh faced a vote of no-confidence which led to highly unruly scenes in the Assembly. A shocked Union government sought President's Rule but the recommendation was returned by the President, K.R. Narayanan. The Allahabad High Court too held that President's Rule was not the right remedy for the events that had taken place in the Assembly.

The Deve Gowda government fell in April 1997, with the Congress withdrawing support from the outside on the ground that it was not being consulted with regard to major decisions. Since no other combination appeared able to form a government, the Congress relented and agreed to support the United Front under another leader. Inder Kumar Gujral, a very experienced politician, who had served in more than one administration from the time of Indira Gandhi, and had been India's ambassador to the Soviet Union, was chosen, and sworn in as prime minister. Though troubled by charges against Lalu Prasad Yadav

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in an alleged fodder scam, which led to Lalu's breaking away to form his own Rashtriya Janata Dal, the government survived with RJD support for a while. It then fell in November 1997, when the Jain Commission report charged the DMK, a United Front partner, with sympathy for the LTTE, which had been responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The Congress withdrew support and Gujral resigned. There being no alternative in sight, general elections were called, with Gujral continuing to head a caretaker government for the next three months.

The Gujral government did have some achievements to its credit. As a former information and broadcasting minister and painfully conscious of the misuse of AIR during the Emergency, he took steps to notify the Prasar Bharati Act, passed by the National Front government in 1990. With some amendments, he also brought into being the dormant public service broadcaster, Prasar Bharati, by the end of the year.

There was public criticism of PB from the start as few, whether in Parliament, the government, its own staff, advertisers, the entertainment world and viewers and listeners understood what public service broadcasting was about, and had mistaken notions of what it should or should not do. The board was described as a mix of Left-leaning intellectuals and Gujral cronies.

With the caretaker government being replaced by the NDA administration, a fresh view was taken of the act, and PB moved into another milieu. S.S. Gill, a former information and broadcasting secretary who had been appointed CEO, was removed as he was over the (subsequently introduced) age ceiling for the post. Earlier, the chairman, Nikhil Chakravartty, a distinguished journalist and highly respected figure who was in his mid-eighties, had been immobilised by illness from which he, sadly, never recovered. And when Gill left, there was no full-time CEO, and the next two CEOs were bureaucrats on deputation from the information and broadcasting ministry. PB never fully recovered.

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In the international arena, both as foreign minister in the previous administration and as prime minister, Gujral played a significant role in steering India's difficult and delicate passage through the complex negotiations at the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on the proposed Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). This was something India had supported as far back as 1954, as a measured step towards a time-bound process of comprehensive nuclear disarmament. Instead, with the enforcement of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in

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1967 and its renewal in 1995, it discovered that the world had been permanently divided into nuclear haves and have-nots, and while the NPT applied to the latter, the former were under no obligation to undertake measures to cap and cut-back their own nuclear arsenals or refrain from qualitative improvements in their nuclear weaponry.

The Indian ambassador in Geneva, Arundhati Ghosh, declared that India would not accept an unequal treaty like the NPT, unless it was emphatically stated that the CTBT was a first step towards a continuing process leading to complete and total nuclear disarmament. Further, while there was a proposal to ban test explosions, no prohibition was sought to be imposed on 'cold testing' through computerised laboratory experiments. While horizontal proliferation was barred, vertical proliferation by the N-5 could continue.

Extraordinary efforts were made to compel India, a potential non-signatory to the CTBT, to become an involuntary signatory under duress. The international community labelled India a 'spoiler'. Immense pressure was brought to bear on it to conform, though not on Pakistan which merely said it would do whatever India did, and none at all on Israel which was known to be in possession of nuclear weapons. The CTBT was, nevertheless, sent from Geneva to the UN General Assembly where it was adopted by 158 votes to 3, with India, Bhutan and Libya opposing it. Ultimately, the US and China did not ratify the treaty and of the 44 ratifications required for it to come into force, only 34 have materialised to date.

India had stood against the world. It was later established that Pakistan was busy exchanging nuclear technology with China, North Korea and Libya; and had contacts with Iran, Saudi Arabia and even elements said to be close to al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden, for sale of nuclear wherewithal through the notorious Dr A.Q. Khan. Some of this, at least, was within the knowledge of the United States.

In the field of foreign relations, Gujral created some angst in the Ministry of External Affairs by appointing Bhabani Sengupta, an irrepressible colleague of ours at the Centre for Policy Research, as an adviser. Bhabani was for rapprochement with Pakistan, something to which Gujral had long been committed as chair of the informal Indo-Pakistan Friendship Society, first set up by Jayaprakash Narayan and J.J. Singh. Gujral met Nawaz Sharif at the UN General Assembly in 1997, and struck a rapport with him. But the personal equation was not enough as events would show.

One of the seminal contributions Gujral made to India's foreign policy was the enunciation of what came to be termed the Gujral

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Doctrine. This primarily stated that on account of the considerable asymmetry between the South Asian neighbours in terms not only of size but comparative levels of development, India should not seek instant reciprocity in all transactions as was the norm, but should be prepared to make unilateral concessions and earn goodwill. In due course, improved relations would bring India the rewards it sought and even reciprocal advantages. The doctrine had many critics who decried it as a soft giveaway policy. It, however, generated confidence and much goodwill in the region and approbation around the world.

Back home, in a major development symbolic of the turn of the tide, Inder Gujral laid the foundation for the Udhampur-Baramulla J&K railway.

There were other wider concerns as well. India was actively involved in the SAARC summit held in the Maldives in 1997, to breathe life into the association by projecting a long-term perspective. In furtherance of this it appointed an Eminent Persons Group under I.H.Zaki, a Maldivian minister and SAARC's first secretary general, to develop such a document. Muchkund Dubey, a former foreign secretary, and Pai Panandiker, the director of the CPR, were the Indian nominees. The group completed its labours over the next year. The SAARC Vision-2025 was reviewed and adopted by the SAARC summit in Colombo in July 1998, by when Atal Behari Vajpayee had become prime minister.

The summit endorsed regional cooperation drawing on the shared cultural heritage of the region. To this end it accepted the recommendation that SAARC should move in phases from SAPTA (a preferential trade area) to SAFTA (a free trade area) based on liberalised rules of origin for intra-regional trade, deeper preferential concessions, especially to least-developed countries and landlocked states, and the removal of structural impediments to greater trade. It endorsed the principle of sub-regional cooperation within South Asia, the promotion of trade-creating joint ventures and investments and trade in tourism and other services, more people-to-people exchanges, and the formulation of a social charter to deal with the issues of poverty, women and children, education, health and family planning. It significantly called for enabling legislation to suppress terrorism and drug trafficking and for measures to prevent abuse of refugee conventions.

Internecine strife within SAARC, particularly strained Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh relations precluded much progress. Much later, interest revived and the SAARC Vision was extended to 2035 by telescoping SAPTA and SAFTA and projecting a South Asian community with a common currency and with Afghanistan, Myanmar and possibly

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Iran as additional partners. This was an effort to make SAARC fly by giving it the vision to make regional cooperation an engine for more rapid economic growth and mutual security.

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Kashmir remained a perennial issue. After India's Operation Brasstacks and Pakistan's Operation Zarb-e-Momin (both military exercises) in 1989-90, Pakistan had raised the ante, leading to the US Gates Mission to Islamabad and Delhi, to cool down what it somewhat exaggeratedly thought could escalate into a nuclear confrontation. The Pressler Amendment was also invoked by Washington against Pakistan in view of anxieties over its nuclear ambitions. India proposed a set of confidence-building measures, which helped revive an Indo-Pakistan dialogue leading to seven foreign secretary level meetings until mid-1994, but a wide gap remained between the two sides. Gujral and Nawaz Sharif held four meetings in 1997-98, but despite much Punjabi bonhomie, few tangible gains were registered.

Meanwhile, the United States, recalling its experience of quiet confidence-building talks and non-official dialogues with the Soviets, Chinese, Arabs and Israelis at various times, had decided to see whether they could broker similar exchanges between India and Pakistan. Harold Saunders, who had anchored the West Asia talks, was brought in to explain the modalities and ground rules. This was followed by US invitations to a mix of Indian and Pakistani diplomats, military personnel, security experts, academics and journalists (I was one of the invitees) to participate in a conference designated 'Confidence Building Measures in South Asia', in October 1991, at Neemrana Fort in Rajasthan.

It was initially moderated by Paul Kriesberg, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington and a former diplomat who had served in the region. Niaz Naik, former foreign secretary and high commissioner to India, and Dr A.M. Khusro, the well-known economist and educationist, were named co-chairs from the Pakistan and Indian side, respectively. Other members included persons like General K.M. Arif, Zia-ul-Haq's right-hand man, and K. Subrahmanyam, India's security guru.

The discussions were amiable. At Niaz Naik's suggestion the deliberations focused on several 'baskets' of issues such as Kashmir, nuclear and military confidence building measures, trade, combating the Kalishnikov and drug culture, people-to-people exchanges and information flows. The talks were christened the Neemrana Dialogue, the neem being a familiar and friendly tree in both countries, and Rana

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a name that would pass muster on both sides! Twenty-six rounds of the Neemrana Dialogue have been held since then, alternately in Delhi and Islamabad or, occasionally, Lahore and Karachi.

The discussions over J&K were animated and even heated at times. The eight or ten Indians normally expressed very diverse views, but there was a lot more conformity on the Pakistani side, especially after the more liberal voices withdrew, for whatever reason. Everything turned on the 'core' Kashmir issue, on which our counterparts were rigid until Musharraf broke the ice.

We invited high-powered captains of industry and heads of chambers of commerce, agricultural scientists and experts in technical education to special sessions, and on each occasion, the Pakistani delegates were greatly enthused by the offers of collaboration made by their Indian counterparts. But at the end of each conversation, there would be the refrain that nothing could be done until the 'core issue' was settled. Our pleas that such collaboration would be mutually beneficial and create a climate of trust and cooperation, which would surely impact on other matters, cut no ice.

On the 'core issue', we suggested very early on that representatives from either side of the LOC, including dissident elements, be invited to participate and air their views, in the interest of better understanding. The first time this was mentioned, some of our Pakistani colleagues were taken aback and when Amanullah Khan, a JKLF leader resident in Islamabad was mentioned illustratively, the response was one of shocked dismissal.

We did, however, get some militant leaders to the table, in due course, on our side, and the Pakistanis arranged for us to meet Abdul Qayyum Khan, the PAK prime minister, and several of his ministers, and the leader of the Opposition, Sardar Ibrahim Khan, at Kashmir House on Siachen Street, Islamabad. Pakistani interest basically revolved around the Valley and contiguous Muslim majority areas, and there were references to the 'oppressive' presence of the Indian security forces and human rights violations.

But our Pakistani colleagues steadfastly refused to discuss, or explain, the situation in and the constitutional status of PAK and the Northern Areas, which I kept raising. Quite obviously, the topic was acutely embarrassing for them, as the lack of autonomy and freedom or 'self determination' there undermined what they said about the 'core issue', on which they were so eloquent. Nor did they show any interest in discussing out-of-the box options on J&K.

In order to break the deadlock, it was suggested that in areas such as

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nuclear and military CBMs and economic exchanges, Neemrana sub-committees might prepare joint papers and submit agreed proposals for consideration. Accordingly, Satish Kumar and I visited Islamabad in November 1995, for discussions with General Arif and Niaz Naik. The joint paper we produced at the end of our deliberations was presented at the next Neemrana round.

We examined seven options for a J&K settlement:

- Maintain the status quo. That was ruled out.
- Hold a plebiscite. This option was favoured by Pakistan but had for some time been seen by India as no longer practical.
- Conduct a multi-regional plebiscite. India was unlikely to favour this while the position of Pakistan and that of the people in J&K was felt to be ambivalent.
- Grant sovereign independence to the entire state of J&K. While the JKLF might favour this, India and Pakistan would be opposed.
- Partition on the basis of an ethno-religious-cultural divide. This would be unacceptable all round.
- Autonomy. This would imply that a measure of internal autonomy be granted to both sides of the LOC on the premise of settlements arrived at with the people, on a regional basis. This autonomy would be irreversible. Phase I of this process was to be completed within ten years. Thereafter, on to Phase II, which envisaged that the state of J&K be demilitarised; the LOC be converted into an international boundary between India and Pakistan; mechanisms be evolved to facilitate trans-boundary interaction between the two sides; and the number of para-military forces be reduced to agreed levels on either side of J&K. The above package was to be guaranteed by the UN Security Council. It was believed that this option might be favourably considered by India but was unlikely to be acceptable to Pakistan, while the wishes of the people of J&K would need to be appropriately ascertained.
- Place J&K under UN trusteeship for a specified period, after which the people were to be given the opportunity to choose between the first six options, or any combination thereof. While some elements had shown interest in this option, India and Pakistan were unlikely to countenance it.

The sixth option was rejected by our Pakistani colleagues despite our remonstrations that it bound nobody. It incorporated ideas that I had canvassed for decades, and the joint paper on J&K Satish Kumar and I did for Neemrana spelt out the process:

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Having demarcated the international boundary down the length of J&K (along the LOC), India should demonstrate its willingness to render it porous. Such a 'soft border' should enable bona fide subjects of the entire J&K state as it originally existed ... to move and trade freely across the border without the formality of passports, visas and currency restrictions up to a given value per head. Thus, people might travel with no more identification document than a driving licence, ration card or magistrate's certificate and carry their own currency up to, say, Rs 5000 or Rs 10,000 per head without permits. It should be open to persons on either side of this divided state to reside, purchase property, take up employment, trade, enrol in an educational or training establishment or seek medical treatment on the other side, subject to certain rules. Access to newspapers, magazines and books should be permitted from the other side. None of this would be unprecedented. Rigid regulations could be liberalised. Parallels were to be found in the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan arrangements and the protocols obtaining under the 1954 Treaty between India and China (pertaining to the Tibet Region of China), and the agreement regarding tribal movements across the Indo-Burma border after 1937 (when Burma was separated from India). A soft border of this description would facilitate easy movement, trade, business, pilgrimage, tourism and other human exchanges and unite divided families. There would be no dual nationality and international passports would be required for travel outside and beyond J&K ...

The Uri-Muzaffarabad, Jammu-Sialkot, Kargil-Skardu and other roads should be restored, improved and thrown open to local, national and international traffic. The Pakistan railway system could be linked via Sialkot-Jammu ...

The further logic of such an unfolding would be demilitarisation of the border (starting with Siachen) ... leading to further measures towards balanced force reductions ...

India might propose that representatives of the two halves of J&K be enabled to meet from time to time to monitor, regulate and expand the human and cultural exchange, trade and tourism engendered by the proposals outlined above. Management of the environment and collaboration in developing the large remaining untapped potential of the Indus system of rivers could be two other subjects of mutual concern ... The

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headwaters of the three western rivers (allocated to Pakistan under the Indus Treaty) lie in the Indian part of J&K. While the Indus Treaty permits India certain consumptive and non-consumptive uses from these rivers (in J&K), mutual suspicion has precluded this from being exploited except to a limited degree and only after prolonged disputation as over the Sallal hydel and Tulbul (Wulur Lake) navigation projects ... This suggests possibilities for joint collaboration, joint management and sharing of further benefits in an Indus-II agreement as envisaged in the Indus Treaty itself ... Mutual access to the Karakoram Highway in Pakistan and a potential Karakoram Pass highway in India could revive and reinvigorate J&K's historic trade routes to Central Asia and Sinkiang.

An over-arching arrangement, straddling both sides of J&K, would provide a mechanism for pulling together the various territorial units comprising the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir conglomerate ... without undermining existing sovereignties.

The principles of settlement proposed would fit well in the framework of SAARC, which could also be persuaded to locate certain regional institutions or facilities in J&K.

I had, in other papers, both earlier and subsequently, envisaged such an 'over-arching structure' in J&K evolving into some form of confederation or co-confederation of twin autonomous entities on either side of the LOC. It is essentially this proposal that was later advocated by Dr Manmohan Singh and Musharraf following the Indian prime minister's statement about 'making J&K's boundaries irrelevant ... mere lines on a map'. Our Neemrana friends were, however, horrified. The idea was anathema until years later Musharraf showed willingness to walk the road less travelled.

In 1964, Nehru had proposed a federal solution for all of J&K within India and Pakistan, and Sheikh Abdullah had carried the proposal to Rawalpindi and Muzaffarabad. Interestingly, in 2002, giving expression to his vision for the future at an *Indian Today* conclave in Delhi, Lal Krishna Advani said: 'Partition was a tragedy. Yet Partition is a reality ... It is not out of place to mention my hope and desire to see the coming together of India and Pakistan in some type of confederal framework in the years to come.'

The Americans were steadfast in attempting to broker peace and, in addition to getting the Neemrana process started, convened two Indo-Pakistan meetings on the Kashmir question at the US Institute for Peace

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(USIP) in Washington, to which persons representing J&K, from both sides, were invited. I attended two such meetings in 1993 and 1994. These conferences provided additional points of contact and were, no doubt, genuinely intended to break the ice. Yet, it was difficult to fathom US intentions.

During the first USIP conference, like some other delegates, I found a sheaf of papers pushed under the door of my hotel room. One of these contained a map incorrectly and mischievously depicting the LOC as incorporating the Siachen glacier in Pakistan's Northern Areas. (However, according to the Karachi Agreement, 1949, that drew the ceasefire line (CFL) and the Suchetgarh Agreement, 1972, that re-designated this as the Line of Control, most of the Siachen glacier, barring its uppermost reach, clearly lay on the Indian side of the line and had always been delineated as running from the last mentioned grid reference NJ 9842 'thence north to the glaciers' without any intervening no-man's land. Further, in the map, the wrongly ceded area of some 250 square kilometres carried the legend 'Indian occupied since 1983'.

My subsequent inquiries through Joseph Schwartzenberg, the reputed Minnesota University geographer and cartographer, indicated that the US Defence Mapping Agency had begun tinkering with the extended LOC around 1967. The line had been firmed up in the 1970s, and soon found expression in other international maps. It had been adopted by Pakistan to legitimise its designs to take over Siachen, which India preempted by physically occupying the glacier and its western wall, the Saltoro Ridge, in 1984.

Why this should have been done gratuitously was mystifying, and to insinuate the map into a US-sponsored Indo-Pakistan peace dialogue was inexplicable. I brought up the matter the next day at the conference. There was no explanation but only a suggestion that the map should be treated as 'withdrawn'. I got no better answer from the State Department, and on returning to Delhi reported the matter to the external affairs and defence ministries. I followed up with Schwartzenberg who was good enough to send me a set of US Defence Mapping Agency maps as they evolved in the Siachen sector, from 1967 onwards until the hardening of the Line. He felt the US agency had acted inadvertently, not maliciously. I later presented these maps to the office of the director general of military operations in 2001, when I was for a short while information consultant to the defence minister. This was news to him!

As a footnote to this episode, in May 1993, I received a letter from Robert Oakley (who had convened the USIP conference) thanking me for attending it. He referred to my bringing up the map issue and said

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my 'insight into the drawing of the line up to China on some US maps is a fascinating footnote on topography. Fortunately, the United States has no pretence or desire to be the arbitrator or official international authority on such lines, maritime or terrestrial. Much is made of such small things by those looking for conspiracies, but this has been around for so long as to have lost its power to generate hysteria'.

This was special pleading indeed! China gobbled up chunks of Aksai Chin in Ladakh by first drawing lines on a map and then occupying the area. Now Pakistan and the world, on the basis of this map, once again labelled India (the aggrieved party) an aggressor in J&K. Many years later, when Robert Blackwill was US ambassador in Delhi, certain statements appeared suggesting that this map was wrongly drawn and the US proposed to make the necessary corrections. Nothing has happened since, and this piece of 'cartographic aggression' remains.

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If the Kashmir problem continued to defy a solution with a two-steps-forward-one-step-back tango, regional cooperation in water resource development saw some welcome progress. When I joined the Centre for Policy Research in 1986, my first order of business was to elaborate my ideas on harnessing the potential of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin through regional cooperation. I set to work on a holistic study of all aspects of integrated water resource development, national and regional and brought this together in *Waters of Hope*.*

The preface to the 1990 edition set the frame:

> Why take the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Barak (Meghna) together? Because they are part of a single, integrated drainage system within a common geo-political region. A flood in one backs up the waters of the other. Nepal and Bhutan are landlocked and North-east India nearly so. All three have similar problems of transit and seek an outlet to the sea. A third of the waters of the sub-continent, less Pakistan, are located in the Brahmaputra and Barak basins and represents a significant regional surplus capable of meeting shortages elsewhere after satisfying all present and prospective sub-regional needs. The vast energy potential of the Brahmaputra, about 40,000 MW in North-east India and maybe 50,000 MW or more along the Indo-Tibet Brahmaputra bend, could be a major resource feeding into an international trans-

*New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co, 1990, updated 1999.

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Himalayan grid. The GBM system of rivers also invites development of an interconnected, inland-cum-coastal waterway, with inland ports networked into an inter-modal transport system. Calcutta is nearer Lhasa as an ocean supply point than either Guangzhou or Shanghai, while Chittagong is the natural entrepot for the southern tier of the Indian North-east ... Hydro-electric potential is to Nepal and Bhutan what oil is to the Gulf, except that this is a renewable and clean resource. Agricultural productivity in Bangladesh, eastern India and Assam cannot improve without regulating water flows and controlling erosion in the upper catchments. The countries of the Basin need to think regionally even if they act and execute programmes locally.

Here then is opportunity. There is no reason why the immiserised population of this resource-rich Basin should remain poor and hostage to a recurring cycle of devastating flood and drought. There is sufficient indication that international funding and technological assistance will be forthcoming in ample measure if the Basin-states decide cooperatively to harness the waters of these mighty rivers, green the mountains and conserve 'losing ground'. Such a vision is no idle dream.

The preface to the 1999 edition carried the argument further:

The signing of the Mahakali and Ganga Agreements by India with Nepal and Bangladesh has created a new framework for integrated regional cooperation. Not all problems have been overcome but eastern Himalayan river development appears poised to move forward. Economic liberalisation and de-regulation are beginning to impact on structural reform in the water and energy sectors. Private investment has entered the scene and water is coming to be seen as an economic as much as a social good. The transition has commenced.

There is now greater sensitivity to environmental issues including the new paradigm of global warming. Sustainability is gradually being translated from an idealised concept to a workable doctrine. Controversy still rages and a World Commission on Large Dams has been set up by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Bank to try and formulate acceptable norms for the future. The United Nations has codified international water law (still not ratified by sufficient numbers to be brought into force) which

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(nonetheless) brings together the collective wisdom of varied experience and can be a guide even if it does not bind ...

Water resource development is not merely an end in itself but must be seen as a means of triggering wider growth and area development. One has to move from uni-focal concerns to a larger systems approach to build synergy: from electric power to energy grids, from navigation to inter-modal transport, from irrigation to improved land use and cropping patterns. Water resource development in the GBM region could be a powerful lever for poverty alleviation, equal opportunity and equity ... This region was once the vanguard of civilisation. It has the resources and opportunity to renew that role.

In 1990, the CPR teamed up with the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, Dhaka, and the Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Kathmandu, to undertake a three-country study on the optimal development of the GBM basin led by myself, Q.K. Ahmad and Bhekh Thapa.

We exchanged papers and met in Delhi, Dhaka and Kathmandu in turn, with occasional field visits. In the ensuing four years we produced three-country volumes and thereafter an integrated, consensual volume. Discussions narrowed differences on specific projects and programmes, deepened our understanding of the issues involved and helped us carry this vision to a wider public of policy makers and stakeholders.

Indo-Nepalese cooperation in this area had long floundered on the principle of cost-benefit sharing. This impasse was broken in the landmark Mahakali Treaty of 1995, which also resolved pending disputes pertaining to the Tanakpur barrage. The treaty basically revolved around the development of the Mahakali basin, anchored by a multipurpose high dam at Pancheshwar along the Mahakali (Sharda) River, which for the most part marks the western border of Nepal with Uttaranchal.

The Pancheshwar project envisaged storage, with a re-regulating dam a little downstream, to produce 6480 MW of peaking power, some amount of irrigation in the Nepal terai, and a substantial amount of augmented and additional irrigation within the Sharda sahayak system in Uttar Pradesh. The letters exchanged with the treaty set out the cost-benefit sharing principles. While the power and augmented discharge from the Pancheshwar reservoir were to be equally shared between the parties, the net power benefit was to be 'assessed on the basis of, inter alia, savings in cost to the beneficiaries as compared with relevant alternatives available'; the irrigation benefit on the basis of 'incremental and additional benefits due to augmentation of river flow'; and flood

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control on the basis of 'the value of works saved and damage avoided'. Should either side, however, not utilise its share of augmented flows, it was precluded from making any claim in any other form. These same principles were to apply to all future water resource agreements between Nepal and India.

In case of disagreement, provision was made for independent arbitration with the chairperson being named by the secretary general of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. India could make no claim to prior appropriation and was bound by the principle of equitable apportionment. Nepal's claim to 'ownership' of flowing water was mistaken. Power not used by Nepal could be sold to India but in the case of Nepal not utilising its half-share of stored water, India would be able to use this and compensate Nepal by contributing proportionately more towards the capital cost of the dam debited to the irrigation component. Likewise, India would need to pay an additional sum towards the capital cost of the dam for any flood cushion it might seek.

Unfortunately, differences continued to forestall a common understanding between the two sides and a further disagreement arose about the location (Poornagiri or Rupali Gad) and, therefore, the size of the re-regulating dam. In view of the Maoist uprising and prolonged political uncertainties in Nepal, the Mahakali and other projects languished. The threads were picked up again in 2008, after the regime changed with the ending of the monarchy, only to stall again in view of recurrent political crises.

Relatively greater success attended the Indo-Bangladesh Ganges (Ganga in India) Treaty, signed towards the end of 1996, after years of controversy and laboured negotiation. Agreement was facilitated by the familiarity of the principal interlocutors on both sides who had been participants in our discussions on the GBM basin. Inder Gujral had become foreign minister and then prime minister, Madhu Dandavate had taken over as chairman of the Planning Commission, while Somnath Chatterjee was now chairman of an influential parliamentary committee.

On the Bangladesh side, Kibria had become finance minister. They were all, by now, conversant with the intricacies of the issues involved in sharing the waters of the Ganga, and the emotions this aroused. They had also come to know one another personally, and could, therefore, carry the matter forward with candour and empathy. Ashim Dasgupta, West Bengal's finance minister, played a key role in ensuring the necessary accommodation.

This thirty-year agreement came after several years of interim and ad hoc sharing arrangements below Farakka, which is the apex of the

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Ganges delta. It delinked sharing from augmentation and placed the accord in a broader regional context with reference to optimal, integrated river basin development. The actual sharing formula guaranteed each side a minimum flow of 35,000 cusecs in alternating 10-day periods during March and April, a period of critical plant growth.

The arrangement was eminently fair to Bangladesh. An assurance was given that efforts would be made to see if further augmentation of flows below the Farakka was possible, on the understanding that while equitable sharing was a right augmentation was a matter of possibilities and accommodation. The alternating switching of flows to guarantee a minimum of 35,000 cusecs, first to one side and then the other during March-April, created technical problems, as there was a possibility that abrupt variations in the release of water could damage the Farakka feeder channel that diverts flows into the Bhagirathi. This caused some heartburn in Bangladesh the first year, a lean hydrological season. India was accused of mala fides. The matter was, however, sorted out, with releases and arrivals being jointly monitored at the Farakka Barrage, the Farakka Feeder in India, and at the Hardinge Bridge in Bangladesh. Flows to Bangladesh were scrupulously maintained and sometimes even exceeded the agreed quantity.

From time to time, however, elements in Bangladesh have continued to complain about getting a raw deal, as this has become a way of diverting attention from the real problems there. If south-west Bangladesh or the Khulna region is being 'desertified', this is because the entire Ganges system has been migrating eastwards over the past century. Since the 1950s, with the further eastward shift of mainstream flows, the Gorai distributary feeding the Khulna region has been blocked by a six-metre-high and thirty-kilometre-long silt plug obstructing its head reach at the Ganges offtake. Thus, as the monsoon flood recedes, little or no water enters the Gorai any time after December-January. It is for this reason that the dry season releases made at Farakka do not service the Gorai but flow to the sea. Bangladesh tried to get over this problem though capital dredging of the Gorai hump with Dutch assistance in 1998-2000. The results were not too promising and the project was abandoned with a change of regime in Dhaka. Bangaldesh would prefer a Farakka-type solution by constructing a barrage across the Ganges below the Gorai outfall to pond up the river and force some of the backwater over the Gorai hump. India offered to assist such a programme in 1998 and there the matter rests. This issue soured Indo-Bangladesh relations for over twenty years, with little understanding by most people on either side about the real problem.

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Other issues like sharing the waters of the Teesta, on which both sides have built barrages and substantial irrigation systems (for which there is inadequate water), and the sharing of some other fifty-odd rivers, including the Brahmaputra and Barak, await resolution. A multipurpose dam on the Barak at Tipaimukh in Manipur, and the diversion of regulated releases from the Brahmaputra storages in the North-east, to Bangladesh, could resolve many of these issues. This is where regional cooperation could optimise GBM basin development in partnership with Nepal and Bhutan as well.

Water and the related issues of displacement and the environment were increasingly to engage the nation's attention, with domestic disputes over the sharing of the waters of the Cauvery, Tehri and Narmada and the proposed inter-linking of rivers being even more bitter than the management of international waters.

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The country celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its Independence in 1997. There were stamps and coins, anthologies* and festivals to commemorate the event. India had survived, democracy had taken root and despite unredeemed promises and expectations, stood poised to enter the new millennium, an Asian Century which Nehru had dreamed of, and in a sense forecast at the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in 1947.

We were then 336 million; are now 950 million and by 2047 will be about 1580 million. This will be both a burden and an asset. In another 50 years we will be a predominantly urban and industrial society. The basic structure of the Constitution will survive, with a more genuinely federalised, multi-tiered polity. With reforms, the economy would grow but there will be brakes on progress unless more attention is paid to agriculture, particularly in rain-fed areas, infrastructure, human resource development and R&D.

On the social side, we forecast that the dismantling of political and economic reservations will start by 2017 and be completed within the ensuing twenty-five years. 'Caste is steadily turning into class and the current turmoil over Mandalisation might, in retrospect, be seen as the dying throes of a fading social order.' The ritualistic edge of caste, a

*CPR published a volume of essays, *Fifty Years of Swaraj: Highlights and Shadows*, edited by Pai Panandiker (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1998), and I helped put together the last chapter 'India 2047', with contributions from our many colleagues.

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focal point for political and economic mobilisation, will probably yield diminishing returns as Bharat, a traditional society, increasingly becomes a more modern India, given universal literacy, increasing gender equality and growing economic opportunity. While individual rights will come to the fore, group rights such as caste, community and ethnic categories will not altogether disappear.

We were prescient in seeing a great thrust from below. 'The tribal awakening will quicken, especially in the North-east and in Middle India. The larger Dalit assertion will seek equality, identity and self-determination within the Indian state. There will probably be a major political upheaval around 2005-10 on the basis of agrarian and social relations, particularly in Bihar and Andhra, as "stability" finally gives way to change.'

We discussed 'ways of life'. We noted that fifty or even thirty years ago, strangers would inevitably strike up a conversation (in a bus or train) with a, 'Where are you from?' The respondent would invariably name his or her ancestral village. Less so today. No more by 2047. 'Nativism' is steadily yielding to pan-Indianism. Mobility and mixed marriages have fostered the intermingling of people from various castes and communities. The joint family is becoming extinct and the Hindu undivided family will disappear even as a tax category.

Tandoori chicken and naan, idli and dosa are ubiquitous. Likewise in the case of clothing, regional interchange has been enormous. Kanchipuram and Banaras silks, and Chanderi, Kota and Venkatagiri sarees and other traditional and local handlooms have gained wide popularity. The salwar-kameez is becoming standard working wear among young women but is having to battle to hold its own against Western clothes—suits, T-shirts and jeans. Cosmetics are in (giving even rural women a sense of dignity and grooming).

Modernisation has often entailed Westernisation. Yet there is resistance to homogenisation, and a search for roots in older traditions. Hindi films, TV and rail travel have been powerful integrative forces. Globalisation favours a more modern concept of Indianness, which will prevail over Hindutva or other definitions of cultural nationalism, despite contrary pulls. Fraternity will emerge as the defining principle in the new national ethos, with culture increasingly distinguished from though encompassing religion. The 'mainstream' will be seen to lie in the inter-mingling of the country's rich and diverse traditions with a melding of the centre and the periphery.

India will become more middle class. Gender time-disposition and food habits will change, with women spending less time fetching water,

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fuel and fodder and in cooking. The chapati may not endure as a home-made staple and, like the appam, may find a new habitat in hotels and restaurants selling 'ethnic food'. The movement from 'craft' to 'art' will gather momentum.

The astrologer and palmist will be employed by hotels to entertain guests with alluring forecasts of love and fortune. Horoscopes will be relegated to the family archives as memories of times past. India will change; but Indianness will remain despite modernisation and globalisation. Life will continue to be rich, varied and bewildering, yet quintessentially Indian.

That was how 1947 and 2047 appeared in 1997.

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14

DOVES, TERROR, SAFFRON AND MUSHROOM CLOUDS

Elections at the end of a three-month Gujral caretaker government saw a BJP-led coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), installed in Delhi, in March 1998. It marked the advent of a new ideology, Hindutva, in national governance. Many wondered what the future held; but with only 178 members of its own, the party's dependence on a miscellany of post-poll coalition partners compelled a moderate stance, under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Nothing daunted, the NDA started with a bang—indeed, a very big bang that reverberated around the world. Losing no time, the government staged the Shakti nuclear tests that Narasimha Rao and his predecessors (going back to Rajiv Gandhi) had baulked at carrying out for fear of sanctions, or had been pressurised by the Americans to abandon. On 11 and 13 May 1998, a series of five nuclear and thermonuclear tests were carried out by India, in the desert sands of Pokhran, in Rajasthan. There was no radioactive fallout as this had been carefully contained. The signature lay in the telltale mushroom cloud.

A scientific team including Dr Abdul Kalam, head of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) who was later awarded the Bharat Ratna and then elected President of India, and R. Chidambaram (Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission) had secretly visited the site earlier, dressed as Army personnel, to supervise the test preparations. Kalam and Chidambaram went as major generals, but discovering that the military team working at the test site was headed by a colonel, who

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could not be outranked, cheerfully downgraded themselves to the same rank!*

The prime minister made the announcement in Parliament. He said India had become 'a nuclear weapon state', and declared a moratorium on future testing. There was widespread jubilation. India had arrived. The world was surprised and worried and a fresh round of sanctions, over and above those levied after India's first test in 1974, inevitably followed. Despite strong international pressure, Pakistan responded a couple of weeks later with its own test explosions in the depths of Balochistan's Chagai range on the plea that India, in concert with Israel, was planning to knock out its nuclear facilities.

Successive Indian prime ministers from Indira Gandhi onwards had taken a close interest in developing the country's military nuclear capability.† The matter was a tightly guarded secret and very few in the political, military, scientific or bureaucratic establishment were kept in the loop, in order to avoid speculation and leakage. The military chafed at this exclusion from a security point of view but secrecy was maintained over a quarter century and there was an equally remarkable consensus among the nation's highest leadership on this issue. Each prime minister briefed his or her successor who then took personal custody of the special security safe containing the relevant papers. Thus, when the Pokhran-II tests took place in 1998, it essentially marked a long-standing consensus across several party lines, through many governments.

India's logic, it seemed, was that clandestine nuclear proliferation in its neighbourhood with the connivance of certain great powers had ringed it with weapons of mass destruction. It had been subject to nuclear blackmail by Pakistan, which had built up its arsenal with Chinese assistance while the US looked on.

Russia, Israel and the US were the other powers with nuclear capability in the region. India had broken free from a discriminatory NPT regime that did nothing to restrain horizontal and vertical proliferation, or to move meaningfully towards comprehensive and total disarmament. From Pakistan's point of view, nuclear parity had enabled it to neutralise India's conventional military superiority. It was soon to demonstrate its belief that it could effectively exploit sub rosa military operations, proxy war or jihadi options below the nuclear threshold, and then cry wolf if India flexed its muscles to retaliate.

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*See Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace* (Delhi: HarperCollins, 2000).

†See 'From Surprise to Reckoning, The KRC Report' (Delhi: Sage, December 1999).

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I had long opposed India going nuclear as this would aggravate tensions and result in additional defence expenditure. These views had undergone modification in more recent years. Nuclear disarmament appeared to be a receding goal and nuclear power was increasingly seen as the currency of power. I was a member of the newly established National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), under K. Subrahmanyam, perhaps the country's leading security expert. The NSAB had nineteen members from various fields, with military, security, intelligence, scientific, diplomatic, economic, administrative and communications expertise, and had been given the task of working on a draft nuclear doctrine. It was the lowest echelon of a three-tiered structure with the National Security Council at the top, followed by the office of the National Security Adviser, backed by the NSAB, which functioned as an in-house think-tank.

The NSAB met regularly and benefited from expert views and wide consultations. It did not take long for it to reach unanimity on certain basic principles. These posited firm civilian supremacy over the nuclear command and control structure, and a posture of minimum credible deterrence rather than building unlimited destructive capability, a no-first-use doctrine, and the build-up of a triad of delivery systems by land, sea and air, in order to ensure second-strike capability. In addition, the reorganisation and modernisation of the nation's higher defence command, an archaic structure left behind by the departing British in 1947, had been recommended.

The other major task given to the NSAB was the preparation of a first-ever Strategic Defence Review. This tended to confirm the view taken by an American security expert that India had never previously evolved a strategic doctrine, but had instead responded in an ad hoc manner to specific events and threats, from time to time. The purpose of the review was to take a holistic view of national security, embracing threats to national unity and integrity from a whole range of complex economic, demographic, technological, environmental and social factors. With such a mapping of threat perceptions, it was believed that the government would be able to fashion appropriate safeguards and countermeasures to protect the national interest. This exercise was completed in the middle of 2000. I had, by then, served two terms in the NSAB, and had found it a stimulating experience that enabled me to learn a good deal and contribute something to the shaping of national thinking and policy.

The NDA government, the country's first post-election as opposed to pre-election coalition, had been just thirteen months in office when

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strains appeared. The coalition was critically dependent on the AIADMK, but its leader, Jayalalitha, had grown increasingly dissatisfied with her role in the scheme of events. Things kept simmering until Jayalalitha found a pretext in the removal of the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagat, by the defence minister, George Fernandes, to withdraw support. The Congress, scenting opportunity, pressed for a Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe the incident. Jayalalitha concurred, and brought down the government by a single vote in the motion of confidence that followed.

A Congress bid to form an alternative government proved abortive and the CPM vetoed a proposal by the AIADMK and Samajwadi Party that its leader, Jyoti Basu, be inducted as prime minister. (Basu was later to describe his party's decision to reject the offer as a 'historic blunder'.) In the absence of any other party or combination being able to form a government, fresh elections were called, with Vajpayee continuing to head a caretaker administration.

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In February 1999, in response to a preliminary agreement reached in September to bury the hatchet after the tensions caused by nuclear testing on both sides, and an invitation from Nawaz Sharif, Vajpayee decided to take the Delhi-Lahore bus (on its inaugural run), to attend a summit meeting with his counterpart. This bold initiative was widely welcomed. The talks were highly productive and, amid scenes of great bonhomie, Vajpayee visited the Minar-e-Pakistan, a national monument commemorating the creation of Pakistan, a move symbolic of India's desire to live in peace and amity with its neighbour.

The two foreign secretaries signed a Memorandum of Understanding, identifying measures aimed at promoting an environment of peace and security. This was followed by the Lahore Declaration, signed by both prime ministers, embodying a shared vision of peace and stability. Both sides pledged to intensify their efforts to resolve all matters, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir; refrain from intervention and interference in each other's internal affairs; pursue a composite and integrated dialogue for an early and positive outcome of the agreed bilateral agenda; take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons; and discuss measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields. The Lahore protocols were hailed as a historic breakthrough.

Tragically, unknown to India, Pakistan had begun to execute an audacious and meticulously planned invasion of the Kargil Heights across the LOC, even as the Lahore protocols were being signed. The

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idea was to use the cold weather to infiltrate into the Indian Army's unoccupied winter positions at dizzy altitudes along a 200-kilometre front east of Dras-Kargil, in a bid to cut off India's land-line to Siachen and Leh; and, when detected, brazenly to proclaim that Indian-based J&K mujahideen had gone on the offensive.

General Musharraf (during whose term as Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff the Kargil conflict occurred) insisted that he had briefed Nawaz Sharif. The latter, however, pleaded that he was not provided adequate information to size up the full portent of what was planned and was thus misled, if not kept in the dark, until India struck back with unexpected force and determination, exposing Pakistan to military and diplomatic humiliation. Pakistan had counted on a weak response by a motley caretaker coalition government in Delhi. It was in for a surprise. The infiltration was detected in late May, and the battle was soon joined with the air and naval arms coming into play, in a well-orchestrated Indian riposte that had Pakistan completely off-balance, as its own commanders had not been taken into confidence by Musharraf.

Never has a war been fought at such heights and under those harsh circumstances, in any part of the world. Much had to be improvised. India limited the battle to its own side of the LOC, which gave it a diplomatic edge and kept the Pakistan Air Force out of the reckoning. The IAF aircraft negotiated narrow valleys, flying in tight circles at ridge level to bomb, strafe and flush out the intruders from the *sanghars* or shepherd huts that they had occupied and fortified. These overlooked the Indian forces fighting their way up the lofty crags rising precipitously from the valley below, with Bofors guns giving powerful support. It was a truly astonishing feat of arms that called for incredible fortitude, courage and sacrifice.

Badly mauled, Pakistan resorted to crying wolf over a potential nuclear confrontation. Musharraf pleaded with Nawaz Sharif to ask President Clinton to bail him out. Sharif flew to the US and was received by Clinton at Blair House on 4 July, the US National Day, and had to accept the American demarche, worked out in telephonic consultation with Vajpayee. This entailed a ceasefire, a complete pull back behind the LOC and restoration of the Lahore process. It was implicit in some of the language used that the LOC was to be regarded as an international boundary that could not be lightly violated.*

The Kargil caper of 1999 was India's first 'television war' as the front

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*See Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit in Blair House* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 2002).

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lay along the main Dras-Kargil-Leh highway. Pictures of the battlefront rallied Indian and international opinion behind Delhi, as the facts were transparent. Quite early on, an Indian intercept of telephonic conversations between Musharraf (in Beijing, where he had gone to drum up support) and General Aziz, Chief of Staff in Rawalpindi, and Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad, had let the cat out of the bag. This was only one fragment of the evidence of perfidy that came tumbling out.

Concerned over the intelligence failure that had led to the intrusion in the first place, the government appointed the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) to study the circumstances leading to the event, and to recommend measures to safeguard against similar intrusions in the future. The committee was headed by K. Subrahmanyam, while Lieutenant General K.K. Hazari (former Vice Chief of Army Staff) and I were members, and Satish Chandra, secretary of the National Security Council Secretariat, was appointed member secretary.

The committee noted that Pakistani shelling across the LOC had greatly intensified through 1998. While some of it was a cover for infiltration, this, by itself, did not presage a clandestine military incursion to create a 'new LOC' as a bargaining chip. There was a critical failure of intelligence, aggravated by inter-intelligence rivalry. Moreover, the weapons and equipment being used were not technologically sophisticated enough for the kind of high-altitude operations involved.

The nuclear factor had to be taken into account too, as there was a nuclear overhang in Pakistan's postures in 1987 during Operation Brasstacks; in January 1990 when Sahibzada Yakub Khan conveyed what sounded like an ultimatum to the foreign minister, I.K.Gujral; and again later that year, when intelligence reports suggested that Pakistan had decided on a nuclear first-use policy. It seemed logical to assume that Pakistan had been emboldened in its proxy war against India in the knowledge that it possessed a nuclear shield and, perhaps, now felt that it had a window, which might soon close, to internationalise the Kashmir issue.

Some believed a Kargil-type situation could had been avoided had the Indian Army followed a policy of Siachenisation by not withdrawing to winter positions and leaving no gaps along the 168-kilometre front from Kaobal Gali to Chorbat La. Such a not-an-inch-of-territory policy would have entailed dissipating available military strength in penny packets to hold uninhabited territory of no strategic value per se. The better alternative was seen to be swiftly to punish wanton and wilful violations of the LOC with the aid of a comprehensive aerial surveillance system.

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The committee recommended making the National Security Council more effective, strengthening both human and, particularly, technical intelligence and analysis, enhancing budgetary allocations to make up for long neglected defence modernisation, better border management, a review of civil, military and media relations, and the reorganisation of apex decision making and the higher defence command. The report was presented to the government on 15 December 1999.

The main report, 'From Surprise to Reckoning' was published as a book and marketed in bookstores countrywide on the very day of its submission. Security deletions were made in the published report by leaving equivalent blank spaces or lines to match the omissions.

The annexures to the report contained a wealth of material, including captured material, such as sector maps and the diaries of some Pakistani officers, which recounted their orders, hardships, thoughts of home and subterfuges such as being filmed as brave mujahideen engaged in battle with the Indian Army for the liberation of Kashmir! They also carried the full transcripts of the revealing Musharraf-Nawaz Sharif-Aziz phone tapes. Sadly, these volumes were never released and remain under wraps, for no good reason. The only result of this ridiculous policy has been to keep the Indian public and international opinion in the dark, while allowing Pakistan's myths, legends and propaganda to remain unanswered, as has been the case since 1947. So much for the commitment to the national motto, Satyameva Jayate!

Much has been made of the fact that though the intrusion had been detected by shepherds on 3 May 1999, and Operation Vijay was launched by the Army and Operation Talwar by the Navy (which bottled up Karachi), the Air Force took until 26 May to commence Operation Safed Sagar. The answer is that the Army was operating within Indian territory and the Indian Navy in the high seas. Any interdiction by the Air Force would have entailed crossing over into Pakistan's air space. That could have invited a PAF response on targets of choice anywhere in India, carrying with it the risk of immediate spatial and military escalation.

India had, therefore, to be prepared and it took a while for the IAF, Army and Navy to be placed on full operational alert to face all eventualities. The IAF had also to modify its aircraft and improvise armaments and tactics to operate in the extremely confined and hazardous battle environment along the Kargil heights, without violating Pakistani air space, and survive the risk of being shot down by Stinger missiles, or even small-arms fire from Pakistani-held *sanghars* atop the ridges. Once it got its act together, the Air Force was relentless and

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performed prodigious feats. The Pakistani Army did not know what had hit it.

As members of the KRC, we traversed the LOC by air, flying almost the full length of the majestic Siachen and landing at its grimy snout, and getting a firsthand impression of the extraordinary jagged terrain that made up the Kargil Heights, where even an adventurous ibex would hardly dare tread. We flew past Tiger Hill and Tololing, now famous names, and got a wonderful view of the giant dome of Nanga Parbat, brooding above the clouds to the far west. We met field commanders and young jawans, and were briefed at every level by the three Chiefs of Staff and others.

Not only did Musharraf's military plans go horribly wrong, but the Pakistani Army, and especially the Northern Light Infantry, suffered substantial casualties. Having led his men to war—and they had fought bravely—Musharraf disgraced his uniform and epaulettes by disowning the corpses. The Indian Army buried several Pakistanis where they fell, but disinterred some later at the request of their families for burial back home. The Pakistani press later reported how on a dark moonless night shrouded corpses of NLI men were brought in trucks and unceremoniously dumped on the doorsteps of their homes around the Northern Areas, marking a callous and inglorious ending to a perfidious war of Pakistan's making.

Many scoffed at the KRC and its 'vague' terms of reference and lack of teeth. It was neither a statutory commission nor a judicial inquiry. Thus it lacked powers to summon witnesses and documents. Far from being toothless or commanding little respect, this indeed was its strength. A simple letter from the Cabinet Secretary addressed to every relevant authority, Central, state, Intelligence, Armed Forces, the Ministries of Home, Defence, External Affairs and relevant scientific establishments, opened all doors. We listed those we wished to meet, serving or retired, political, civil or military, including former Presidents, prime ministers and ministers, and the documents we wished to access.

Advertisements invited those with any information or something to say to get in touch. Many responded. We took oral evidence, asked questions, prepared transcripts of the conversations and, thereafter, requested the witnesses to add to, amend or rephrase whatever they had stated, or make any deletions so that each person was comfortable with whatever he or she had placed on record. Some did so. The corrected or revised statements were then signed by the witnesses and returned to the committee.

The testimony compiled was, therefore, more complete and binding

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than anything extracted on oath. The most intimate secrets of government—nuclear, intelligence, diplomatic, operational, scientific—were revealed to us with candour and in a spirit of trust and cooperation. The committee, in turn, promised to include in the report only that which would not compromise national security or cause embarrassment to anybody.

Narasimha Rao initially did not wish to speak about the country's nuclear programme to the KRC. Nonetheless, he took Subrahmanyam, the KRC chairperson, into confidence and said that when he demitted office he had fully briefed his successor, Vajpayee. When the committee met Rao, we skirted the nuclear issue and dwelt on other matters in some detail. At the end of the discussion, Subrahmanyam was to write* 'George Verghese asked him why in view of the Kashmir situation he had outlined, the defence budget was cut in his time. Rao replied that was because the nuclear deterrent was under development and that had priority. He then went on to tell us on his own how the nuclear arsenal was operationalised during his premiership.' Subsequently, Rao agreed to his evidence being recorded in the KRC proceedings.

Commissions have notoriously been used to delay, duck or obfuscate matters of urgent public importance; and judicial inquiries too often lack the political and social insights that are of much greater value than purely judicial determinations. The KRC laid the basis for informed public debate on subjects hitherto taboo such as intelligence, higher defence management and border policy.

The government of the day must be given full credit for immediately appointing a high-powered Group of Ministers to examine the report. It acted expeditiously and set up four task forces to flesh out the KRC's findings and translate them into programmes of action. This was done, and many reforms were in fact implemented. The KRC's analysis formed the basis for formulating a national security doctrine that the country finally adopted.

Critics later faulted the KRC for not indicting anybody and causing heads to roll. That was not part of its remit. Had it been required to do that, or done so on its own, the report would have been mired in controversy and many of its more valuable findings would have been scattered to the winds.

Sadly, Pakistan remained in denial, a conditioned reflex since 1947, and many were led to believe that Pakistan had once again been wronged and that it had, in fact, actually won something of a victory.

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*_The Tribune_, 29 December 2004.

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Nawaz Sharif spilt the beans, but by then he had been ousted by Musharraf in a coup, while in the air on his way back to Karachi from Colombo, where he had gone on an official visit. Pakistan returned to yet another spell of military dictatorship, and Nawaz Sharif went into exile in Saudi Arabia.

The then director of operations, Pakistan Air Force, Group Captain M. Kaiser Tufail has revealed* that the Kargil operation was clandestinely mounted by the Pakistan Army. The Air Force was informed of this by the 10th Corps commander, Lieutenant General Mahmud Ahmad, after the operation had commenced, sometime in mid-May 1999. Let Tufail tell the story:

> Lieutenant General Mahmud Ahmad broke the news that limited operations had started two days earlier. It was nothing more than a 'protective manoeuvre' meant to foreclose any further mischief by the enemy who had been a nuisance along the Neelum Valley road. He then elaborated that a few vacant Indian posts had been occupied on peaks across the LOC overlooking the Dras-Kargil Road. These would, in effect, serve the purpose of airborne observation posts meant for directing artillery fire with accuracy. Artillery firepower would be provided by a couple of field guns that had been heli-lifted to the heights piecemeal and reassembled over the previous few months when the Indians had been off guard during the winter extremes. The target was a vulnerable section of the Dras-Kargil road, whose blocking would virtually cut off the crucial life-line which carried the bulk of supplies needed for daily consumption as well as annual winter stocking in the Leh-Siachen sector. Thereafter, the monsoon would prevent vehicular movement and suspend all air lift by the IAF. 'Come October, we shall walk into Siachen—to mop up the dead bodies of hundreds of Indians left hungry, out in the cold.'

Tufail adds that the air force officers were startled by the smug appreciation of the situation by the Corps Commander. This led an incredulous Air Commodore Abid Rao to quip, while walking out of the briefing room, that 'after this operation, its either going to be a Court Martial or Martial Law'.

Tufail concludes:

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*See *Defence Watch*, March 2009.

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Kargil, I suspect, like the '65 and '71 Wars, was a case of not having enough dissenters, devil's advocates if you will, during planning because everyone wanted to agree with the boss.

*

Just as Musharraf was planning his military takeover, India went to the polls. The results gave the BJP-led NDA under Atal Behari Vajpayee a comfortable victory with 303 seats in a House of 543. This time the government would last its full term. The new administration was sworn in on 13 October 1999, just a day after General Musharraf staged his coup in Islamabad. The government had barely settled down when, on Christmas Eve, an Indian Airlines Airbus IC 814 piloted by Captain Devi Sharan, en route from Kathmandu to Delhi, was hijacked by five masked men, all Pakistani nationals, at around 4.20 p.m., just after it had entered Indian air space, and was ordered to head for Lahore. The Pakistani authorities refused the aircraft permission to land in Lahore, in order to avoid suspicion of complicity. The pilot then diverted the aircraft to Amritsar where it was given permission to refuel in order to gain time after a passenger, the newly-married Rupin Katyal, was stabbed and slowly bled to death. Since the women had been segregated, his young bride did not learn of this terrible tragedy until later.

Strangely, the aircraft was neither refuelled nor stormed at Amritsar by the National Security Guard, which had been alerted. Nor was it disabled and prevented from taking off. This was an amazing foul up. Sensing imminent danger to the other passengers from the increasingly restless hijackers, Captain Sharan took off for Lahore and was reluctantly given permission to land, as the aircraft was by then dangerously low on fuel. Refuelling was permitted on the condition that the plane took off immediately thereafter. The hijackers then announced Kandahar as their destination but since it was now dark and Kandahar lacked night-landing facilities, Captain Sharan advised flying to Dubai where some passengers were permitted to disembark, and Rupin Katyal's corpse was offloaded.

The aircraft resumed its flight to Kandahar after some hours, and landed in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan on Christmas Day. Since India had no diplomatic relations with the Taliban, negotiations were delayed. Pakistan, one of three nations that had recognised the Taliban government, was totally non-cooperative though Kandahar and the airport were known to be swarming with Pakistani intelligence. Negotiations commenced on the third day, with the government refusing to bow to the demands of the hijackers who sought the release of three

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prominent Pakistani jihadis detained in Indian prisons under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA).

But, by now, the pressure of the passengers' relatives and the public and their demonstrations of grief and anger had begun to tell on the government at home. The foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, was detailed to fly to Kandahar with the three named TADA prisoners, and exchange them for the passengers and crew of the ill-fated IC 814. Jaswant Singh was later to describe what happened in Kandahar,* and the difficult choice between two 'moral rights'—securing the release of 166 innocent passengers and crew, or retaining custody of 3 dangerous men, Maulana Masood Azhar, an evangelist of the Deobandi school espoused by the Taliban, Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, chief of the Al-Umar Mujahideen, and Ahmed Umar alias Syed Sheikh. They were guilty of spreading ideological hatred, criminal killings and murder, and the taking of hostages, respectively. The men had masterminded several conspiracies and crimes, and would no doubt continue on this evil course if set free.

The exchange was made as night fell on the twentieth century, and the Indian rescue plane brought the traumatised hostages back home and to safety in Delhi, as the new millennium dawned. An ordeal had ended at great price, and Indo-Pakistan relations plummeted yet again. Possibly emboldened by its nuclear shield and desirous of indicating that Kargil had not knocked the fight out of it, Pakistan appeared determined to keep pushing the envelope. Thus Delhi's historic Red Fort, a symbol of power and authority, was attacked a year later by Pakistani Lashkar-e-Toiba operatives, even as the IC 814 hijack still rankled.

Nawaz Sharif had implored Clinton during their meeting in Washington, at the time of the Kargil War, to take a hand in improving Indo-Pakistan relations. The President had promised to do so, and came to India on a five-day visit in March 2000, spending less than a day in Pakistan to tell Musharraf that the Line of Control must be respected, and that borders (read the LOC) could not be redrawn by military force. He was now deeply concerned that India and Pakistan should exercise nuclear restraint and enter into a purposeful dialogue. In addition to these issues, collaboration in combating terror, and the need to lift Indo-US economic and strategic relations to a new level made up the agenda for his talks with Vajpayee in Delhi.

Both sides expressed satisfaction over the visit, which marked the commencement of fourteen rounds of intensive but relaxed discussions

*See Jaswant Singh's memoirs, *A Call to Honour* (Delhi: Rupa, 2006).

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between US deputy secretary, Strobe Talbott, and India's foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, on what came to be termed NSSP, or the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership. This marked the beginning of the de-hyphenisation of India and Pakistan.

What did not go unnoticed was that Clinton's visit was preceded by a massacre of thirty-five Sikhs in Chattisinghpora, by cross-border terrorists.

Despite these provocations, Vajpayee persevered in his peace efforts. Local militant groups in J&K favoured dialogue but Pakistani groups like the LeT, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Harkatul Mujahideen, directly controlled by the ISI, continued to wage their jihadi war. Abdul Gani Lone, a moderate Hurriyat member and leader of the People's Conference, was assassinated because he had begun to talk peace. Vajpayee pressed on, announcing a ceasefire in J&K from Ramzan 2000, provided there was no offensive action from the other side. The Hizbul Mujahideen welcomed the initiative but Salahuddin, its chief, located in Muzaffarabad, denounced it within days, presumably under pressure from Islamabad.

In an effort to break the impasse in Indo-Pakistan relations, Vajpayee suggested a quiet summit with Musharraf in Goa. Fearing that monsoon landings could be problematic, it was decided to shift the venue to Agra. Any notion of a secluded meeting was soon banished. Musharraf announced that he would be coming with a large entourage and scores of media personnel, academics and commentators. He was clearly on a public relations drive and insisted on breaking journey in Delhi in order to meet Hurriyat leaders, whom he had directly contacted over the heads of his Indian hosts. The Indian media went overboard in hosting the Pakistani commentators round the clock, and then travelled en masse to Agra. At a lunch hosted by the prime minister for Musharraf, I was seated next to a senior Pakistani Foreign Office official who, in response to a query, blandly stated that the Northern Areas were not part of Jammu and Kashmir. He was unable to sustain his case when pressed further! This hardly presaged well for the ensuing talks.

The talks lasted three days with both one-on-one and full-delegation meetings. A number of useful confidence building measures, proposed by India on the eve of the summit, were brushed aside by Pakistan, which insisted that Kashmir was the 'core issue' and that cross-border terrorism was an escapist reference to the Kashmiris' freedom struggle. The tone was set by Musharraf's breakfast meeting with editors, on the second day at Agra. This was broadcast in full within a few hours to the surprise of the Indian delegation, which felt that the Pakistani President

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was intent on playing to the gallery. The President kept framing draft texts with Vajpayee which, despite more than one reformulation, were rejected by the assembled Indian Cabinet ministers next door. These formulations begged the question of cross-border terrorism and kept talking of a settlement without reference to the Lahore Declaration and Pakistan's commitments in this regard.

The failure of the Agra summit was disappointing but not entirely unexpected. The world was soon to learn where the problem lay.

*

On 11 September 2001, the United States was attacked by al Qaeda terrorists. Four civil airliners were hijacked by these men, as they took off from Boston. Two were deliberately flown into the World Trade Centre in New York, bringing down the twin towers which soon became raging infernos. A third airliner crashed into a side of the Pentagon in Washington, while a fourth airliner, also headed for Washington, crashed in rural Pennsylvania as passengers struggled to retake control of the plane. The nineteen hijackers were led by Mohammad Atta and included fifteen Saudis, two from the UAE and one each from Egypt and the Lebanon, all well-educated and highly-motivated men, who had trained for this highly complex and dreadful suicide mission.

It was Osama bin Laden's reply to what was termed the United States' assault on Islamic peoples in Palestine and Iraq, in particular. The US, in conjunction with NATO, responded by declaring a 'War on Terror'. Land and air forces were deployed to liberate Afghanistan, now formally under a Taliban government (which Pakistan and Saudi Arabia recognised), and flush out the al Qaeda leadership operating from its mountains.

Osama bin Laden had earlier relocated from Saudi Arabia to the Sudan and then, in 1996, to Afghanistan, where he had assisted the Taliban (founded by Pushtuns and Islamic seminarists from madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan) under the leadership of Mullah Omar, to expel the Soviet occupation forces and consolidate its hold over the country. Pakistan and Afghanistan had gradually begun to emerge as the epicentre of global terror. Al Qaeda and the Taliban (which destroyed the famous Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001) both believe in restoring Sunni Islam to its pristine glory by defeating the 'American (Christian)-Jewish-Hindu conspiracy', ending the occupation of Islamic lands, and restoring Shariah law and the Caliphate, extending to and including Kashmir.

The Americans knew that Pakistan was heavily involved with the

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Taliban (which it had trained with US assistance in the war against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan). Islamabad had also nurtured its own terror groups under various names and guises to fight in Kashmir and destabilise India, playing both sides in the process. The US now asked Pakistan bluntly on whose side it was. US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, was sent to Islamabad and, in Musharraf's own words, delivered a stern message. Pakistan must either join the War on Terror or get ready to be bombed back to the Stone Age. Musharraf had no option but to string along, once more to become America's leading frontline state.

The US had again adopted self-serving double standards. India had, since 1980, suffered terror attacks and huge casualties and 'collateral damage' in Punjab, Kashmir and elsewhere. Pakistan had brazenly siphoned away US aid and equipment for its own cross-border campaign, and had engaged in nuclear proliferation and drug running while Washington looked away, or found strained justifications for glaring acts of omission and commission—all of which were documented by American journalists and authors, in course of time. America's War on Terror was believed to have some higher purpose while India's greater suffering was set aside, and it was advised to show restraint and magnanimity, and make concessions to appease the aggressor.

On 13 December 2001, five Pakistani terrorists attacked Parliament House in Delhi. The terrorists, six security personnel and a gardener were killed in a forty-five-minute encounter, and some suspected Indian accomplices were subsequently arrested. The country was horrified by the audacity of the attack, which was believed to have been mounted by the LeT and Jaish. Pakistan, however, refused to take action against these elements on the ground that India had provided insufficient proof of their involvement. Not satisfied with this response, India suspended the Amritsar-Lahore bus service, and mobilised its forces along the Indo-Pakistan border under Operation Parakaram, a major act of coercive diplomacy. International opinion too came down on Islamabad, and on 12 January 2002, Musharraf stated in a broadcast address that the LeT, Jaish and five other organisations had been banned, and that no (cross-border) terrorism would be permitted from Pakistani soil.

The Indian Foreign Office welcomed the statement and asked the Pakistani President to walk his talk. Musharraf had also added the usual refrain, 'If you wish to normalise relations between India and Pakistan, and within this region if you wish to bring harmony, then the Kashmir dispute must be resolved through peaceful dialogue, in accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir . . . Kashmir runs

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in our blood. No Pakistani can afford to sever links with Kashmir ... We will continue to extend our moral, political and diplomatic support to Kashmiris ...'

No surprise then, when in May, Pakistani fidayeen attacked a bus near the Kaluchak Army Camp near Jammu, killing thirty-five. India expelled Pakistan's high commissioner in Delhi. Reports that the banned terrorist groups in Pakistan had been permitted to regroup or resurface under different names were fully proven in October 2005, when a severe earthquake struck PAK, north of Muzaffarabad along the LOC. Pakistani military bunkers suffered heavy damage and it was the jihadi groups who emerged in full strength in PAK to render relief, working with international aid groups and receiving official assistance.

September-October 2002 saw Assembly elections in J&K, despite a determined poll boycott and violence in the Valley. The overall turnout in the 4 phases of polling was around 45 per cent. Gratified by this result after a closely monitored poll, the government called off Operation Parakaram, a military exercise along the Indo-Pak border. The National Conference was voted out and a new Congress-People's Democratic Front coalition took office.

The previous administration had set up two committees to study and report on state and regional autonomy, respectively. These reported in April 1999. The State Autonomy Committee recommended going back to the position obtaining in 1954, when elements of the Delhi Agreement negotiated between Sheikh Abdullah and Nehru in 1952 regarding Union-J&K relations were brought into force; and that everything else should be omitted and declared void. The Regional Autonomy Commission suggested two alternatives. The first was to divide the state into eight provinces, four in Kashmir (including the Chenab Valley), two in Jammu, and two in Ladakh, namely, Kargil and Leh. The second was to devolve more powers on the existing district councils and their lower echelons, in an empowered version of panchayati raj.

The NDA government summarily rejected the State Autonomy Report. It was willing to concede 'devolution' but not 'autonomy', presumably drawing a line between a gift from above and the assertion of a right from below. The consideration, without consultation, was summary and crude, made a distinction without a real difference and raised hackles in Kashmir, which felt slighted and rebuffed. Also, the BJP had long argued for the abrogation of Article 370 to ensure J&K's complete integration with India. The fallacy lay in a lack of constitutional understanding. Article 370 is no more than a mechanism for regulating Centre-state relations vis-a-vis J&K. Integration is governed by Article I

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and List I which define the territories of India. These make J&K as fully integrated a part of India as, say, Bihar or Madhya Pradesh. Many other states too, such as Nagaland and Goa, enjoy special dispensations under Articles 371 A to I. So do Fifth Schedule Areas. In any case, the BJP's stand on Article 370 roused strong feelings and led to further controversy.

*

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and Soviet Communism shifted the focus of international attention to the Gulf, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The response was swift. Operation Desert Storm saw a US-led coalition drive Saddam out of Kuwait and impose harsh sanctions on Iraq. The ensuing anger on the Arab street nurtured the al Qaeda and the Taliban, and their offshoots in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's tribal belt along the Durand Line.

There was a further twist in the tale when, in 2003, the US and Britain decided that Saddam was responsible for harbouring terrorists, and was clandestinely developing a nuclear arsenal and other weapons of mass destruction. Every possible suspicion and rumour was dressed up as hard fact, and the UN coerced into taking action to bring Iraq to heel and engineer a change of regime. A team led by Hans Blix, head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission and El Baradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) went over Iraq with a toothcomb, and followed other leads covering a wider geography. But they found no credible evidence of imminent nuclear capability or weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Nothing daunted, the American President, George Bush II, remained intent on war, and Operation Iraqi Freedom followed. It was brutal, ineffectual and disastrous. It stirred the Arab and wider Islamic world as nothing before, and unleashed new waves of global terror and human rights abuses. Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and 'rendition flights' became household terms for vicious counter-terror. UN bodies such as the FAO, WHO and UNDP and independent humanitarian agencies estimated that sanctions against Iraq had cost anything up to half-a-million innocent civilian lives, mostly those of women and children. More American soldiers and Iraqis were killed after Bush declared 'victory'.

I had been to Iraq with an official Indian goodwill delegation in October 2002, a few months before the Americans launched Operation

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Iraqi Freedom. The team was led by the then deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, Najma Heptullah. We visited Baghdad, the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf, and Babylon and met political figures, parliamentarians, officials, some diplomats and UN and other humanitarian aid personnel. The air was thick with foreboding. Some Iraqis we met were critical of Saddam, but a sense of outraged national pride had rallied them round the regime because of unfair sanctions, the destruction of infrastructure, the loss of employment and the flight of professionals from the country as the best and brightest had emigrated. The most modern and secular among the Arab nations was under siege. One could sense an unfolding tragedy and, underlying it, a huge moral wrong that further fuelled Islamic radicalism.

*

Having commenced a dialogue on the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership with the United States, Yashwant Sinha, the new foreign minister, turned towards refashioning a more cooperative neighbourhood policy, especially with regard to trade and regional cooperation. India had become a dialogue partner of ASEAN, and then, of the Asian Regional Forum. Now SAARC issues like harmonisation of tariffs, notifying 'negative lists' (items from which alone would be barred), and non-reciprocal concessions by India on the model of the Gujral Doctrine were taken forward. More boldly, the idea of a South Asian Community, a political union, was mooted. However, when it came to expanding economic cooperation with China, there was hesitation. Trade with China by sea was all right; but the idea of throwing open the north-eastern borders to trade with China triggered the fear of hidden dangers. Yet this was vitally necessary if the North-east was to be a land bridge to East and South-east Asia, as the states in the region, hitherto bottled up, quite clearly desired.*

The objections to opening this trade route were never clearly spelt out, but it would seem the government feared the dumping of Chinese goods, enhanced gun-running, greater smuggling of narcotics and other merchandise, and the opportunity for penetration by dubious interests. Closed borders and the absence of trade facilitation measures along permissible trade routes (such as Moreh-Tamu-Mandalay), however, encouraged smuggling. Chinese and other imported goods were openly available all over the North-east and, most amusingly, on vestibule trains running between Alipur Dooar and New Jalpaiguri. Vendors

*See my *India's North-east Resurgent* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996/2004).

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carrying merchandise and catalogues would hawk goods from carriage to carriage, and book orders for catalogue items and/or spare parts, for guaranteed delivery at any given address in the country! Licensed smuggling from Tamu via Moreh was a daily tourist draw with several bus loads from Imphal going back laden with goodies. The reluctance to open up trans-border trade therefore made little sense.

In any event, the CPR took a lead in responding to the so-called Kunming Initiative, sponsored by the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS) for promoting trade between south-west China (notably Yunnan and Sichuan) and Myanmar, Bangladesh and India's North-east and West Bengal. Underlying this was the fact that the first round of Chinese economic reforms had been confined to the eastern seaboard and while new investment and employment opportunities had moved inland, south-west China, which was landlocked but bordered the fast growing ASEAN economies, had been advised by Beijing to open up to their international neighbourhood through Yunnan. Accordingly, Pai Panandiker and I set off to Kunming to establish contact with YASS.

We were warmly received and had the opportunity of meeting Professors of the South Asia Department of YASS, party leaders and the governor of Yunnan, as academia, party and State were working hand in hand in pursuance of a common objective. I went on to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, and further to Chongching (formerly Chungking) for meetings with the Sichuan and Chongching Academies for South Asian Studies. Our Chinese colleagues were enthusiastic and said they would host a meeting of academics from Bangladesh, India, south-west China and Myanmar in Kunming.

Within the year, the first meeting of the Bangaldesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) forum was held in Kunming. The CPR associated the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi, and several other China specialists, Chambers of Commerce, business interests in West Bengal and Assam, north-eastern intellectuals and politicians in the enterprise. We also consulted the government, which became increasingly lukewarm with the passage of time.

The Chinese had come well briefed with clearances from Beijing. They wanted to move fast on establishing four-way connectivity, trade and investment protocols, tourism packages, and the establishment of a BCIM secretariat, and also thought of involving the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank for investments. The Myanmarese spoke from written texts on agenda items and, while welcoming trade, said they would need to consult Yangon on all issues. The Bangladesh team was enthusiastic and sought to direct transit through their territory, as

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would be logical. The Indian position was that we had no mandate to commit our government to anything. We would report back but would prefer to move step by step, after due consultation and study. We finally agreed on the formulation that it would be for BCIM, an essentially academic forum, to conceptualise and flesh out ideas and proposals, for governments to facilitate agreed and approved proposals and for industry and government to implement those thereafter. We, accordingly, set up country-wise study groups to look at, consult and report on connectivity, trade facilitation, tourism, and cultural and academic exchanges.

The second BCIM round was hosted by the CPR in Delhi, in 2002, followed at yearly intervals by further rounds in Dhaka, Yangon and Kunming. Nothing conclusive has emerged thus far but the idea awaits a better political climate that brings all four governments on board.

*

Meanwhile, things had begun to stir at home. Following the Bofors trail and alleged irregularities in Kargil-related defence purchases, the news website tehelka.com under Tarun Tejpal planned a sting operation in 2001 to blow the lid off shady defence deals being pushed by middlemen. Learning that the Army was in the market for advanced battlefield thermal imagers, Tehelka managed to bait a lowly section officer in the defence ministry, who led them up the food chain to senior officials and military brass, party bosses and the defence minister himself.

Tehelka pretended to be a London-arms supply company, West End, printed a bogus catalogue and letterhead and went to work. Its purpose was to show how easy it was to penetrate the defence ministry. It succeeded brilliantly. Reporters Aniruddha Bahal and Mathew Samuel worked diligently, building up their story, piece by piece, with the aid of spy cameras that shot sequences in offices, living rooms, political party offices and hotel suites over seven months. As the story unfolded they grew increasingly apprehensive that their cover might be blown. They finally edited forty hours of tape down to a ninety-two-minute story, which they broke before an influential invited audience of media men and public figures.

It was devastating. Caught on camera were major generals and brigadiers, an additional secretary, the BJP president, Bangaru Laxman (shown salting away a lakh of rupees in a drawer) and Jaya Jaitley, president of the Samata Party to which the defence minister, George Fernandes, belonged. She was shown welcoming a donation to the party and offering to speak to 'sahib', obviously to smooth matters. The

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news shocked the nation. Bangaru Laxman was forced to resign but was honest enough to exclaim, 'But how else does a party collect money?' Jaya Jaitley and others were in denial and alleged doctoring of the tapes. George Fernandes had to resign, as he had been named and the Samata sequence was shot in his official residence, which the party used.

The NDA, BJP, Samata Party and the government were badly scarred. A probe was ordered but the terms of reference focused on the authenticity of the tapes, the morality of sting operations and the bona fides of the reporters and the sources of Tehelka's funding, which were completely above board. Both Tehelka and its financiers were ruined as a result of an officially-staged vendetta. Justice was not done. Tehelka had to shut down and was later resurrected, in a new incarnation, as a news magazine that its devoted readers and outraged citizens gladly supported. That surely was vindication!

The government and the defence ministry, in particular, had lost credibility. Jaswant Singh, the foreign minister, was asked to double up as defence minister in place of Fernandes, and in that capacity invited Arun Singh (former Congress minister of state for defence) and me to join his team. Arun Singh was designated Special Assistant to the Raksha Mantri and I was named Information Consultant to the Raksha Mantri or ICRM, a suitably ballistic title that I hoped would evoke both fear and respect!

Jaswant Singh, whom I had long known, had called me one day soon after taking additional charge of his new appointment, and expressed not merely dissatisfaction but concern at the conduct of the defence ministry's public information system. Charges made over Bofors, post-Kargil and, now, following the Tehelka exposure, had gravely affected military and public morale regarding the credibility of the procurement system and the quality of the weapons and equipment with the armed forces. Systemic changes seemed called for in order to better inform the public and restore confidence that the defence services and national security were not being short-changed. I had had some journalistic association with the armed forces over the years and had been a member of the Kargil Review Committee. Would I help? I said I would be honoured to do so, and was soon ensconced in the defence ministry, after being formally 'cleared' for the job and taking the official oath of secrecy.

I informed the defence minister that I was associated with the CPR and was busy writing a book. I also had an assignment to write a monograph on the Ford Foundation's role in the development of social sciences in India (of which more later) and was involved with a number of NGOs and in inter-country dialogues. I stated this upfront to avoid

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any subsequent embarrassment to the government and assured the minister that there was and would be no conflict of interest. I said I believed the task could be completed within six to eight weeks and I would, meanwhile, not intrude into the normal working of the office of the Defence Public Relations and Information Directorate which was headed by a senior information service officer, assisted by PROs drawn from the three services.

I enjoyed access to the minister who kindly invited me to participate in his weekly staff meetings.

George Fernandes had earlier sought a review of defence information and had put in place a group under the additional secretary, Ajay Prasad, which was making slow headway as there were divergent civil and service views. Jaswant Singh, however, asked me to proceed independently though I was free to liaise with it too.

I was cordially received by all concerned and established contact with the military attaches of several embassies, notably, those of the US, UK, Russia, France, Australia and Canada. All were most helpful, sending me literature and referring me to their websites for further details. The Russian defence attache called on me for a personal discussion, while the US and UK embassies invited me to spend time with their defence information services, if I planned to visit Washington or London. As it happened, I was due to visit both capitals and, with the permission of the minister, agreed to spend a couple of days with the defence ministry in the UK and the Pentagon, for a briefing on their defence information systems.

Back home I discussed the matter with the top brass and senior officials, as well as with Arun Singh and then proceeded to draft my report, 'Information as Defence: Media Relations in an Instant World' (See Appendix 5). Apart from detailing why the use of information to win hearts and minds is vital for the nation's security, I also pointed out how this could be done effectively. The report though never made public was, nonetheless, leaked selectively, thus conveying a misleading idea of its content. Jaswant Singh, however, was delighted and wished to implement it straightaway.

From my earlier experience in the PMO, I was convinced that senior defence information personnel must be privy to whatever happened in the decision-making loop, and should be in a position to advise the decision makers on how to handle given situations. The system they operated should, in nuclear jargon, have first strike information capability, else the strategic advantage in winning hearts and minds and influencing public opinion would pass to the adversary.

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While functioning in the defence ministry, I sensed unease about letting uniformed personnel appear before the media, whereas they are often best qualified to speak of the performance of weapons and equipment and battlefield conditions, as they obviously carry more conviction than omniscient babus. In consultation with the powers that be, I encouraged ranking officers to attend briefings. Thus Lieutenant General S.S. Mehta, readying to take over the Army Training Command, Shimla, spoke about certain weapon systems; Vice-Admiral Arun Prakash explained the new naval procurement policy—the most advanced among the three services at the time—in view of the controversy about contracts, single-vendors, make-or-buy choices, middlemen and allegations of corruption. These were on the record. In the case of the Air Force, the Air Chief decided to give an off-the-record briefing himself. The director, DRDO, Dr Atre, spoke about defence research and its constraints and successes. All these briefings were handled with aplomb by the officers concerned. The exercise did have a positive impact and stilled many a controversy based on hearsay or motivated gossip. Yet certain sections of the media did not take kindly to this 'unhealthy precedent'.

In the meantime, *The Asian Age* wrote about Jaswant Singh having inducted two of his friends into the defence ministry, prompting Nilotpal Basu (CPM) to raise the issue in the Rajya Sabha. How was it that Arun Singh was virtually running the defence ministry? The newspaper had reported that Verghese had travelled around the world, ostensibly to revamp the defence information system, and was engaged in structuring an information warfare unit to be headed by someone like himself, meanwhile acting as a super spokesperson.

Jaswant Singh told the House that Arun Singh had headed the task force set up by the Group of Ministers (GOM) that approved the Kargil Review Committee report to flesh out the recommended reorganisation of the higher defence management system. So he thought it would be appropriate to invite him to assist in implementing the reorganisation scheme, as special adviser. He had earlier virtually held independent charge of the defence ministry under Rajiv Gandhi, and was possibly the best minister of state for defence the country had ever had. I do not think Jaswant Singh overstated the case. I certainly found Arun Singh a cut above most others.

Turning to me, Jaswant said he had approached me because of my background as a journalist, my stint in government in the PMO and, more recently, as a member of the Kargil Review Committee. Rebutting the charge of cronyism, the minister said, 'It is a known fact that George Verghese has political persuasions which are totally opposed to the

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political party that I belong to.' He also repeated the conversation I'd had with him before accepting the position. 'You know, Jaswant, that your political philosophy and mine do not match,' I'd said. 'Yes, I agree. But here we have a task,' he had responded. The minister was generous in his appraisal of the job I had done.

As consultant to the RM, I was invited to attend some briefings in the MEA, such as those that preceded the Agra Summit, though I had no role, whatsoever, beyond that. The media criticism of me as ICRM was a travesty, based on idle gossip. I stayed a few weeks longer at Jaswant's persuasion, and spent some time trying to open up and reorganise the defence ministry library, a little treasure trove that had been left totally uncared for and unused, for years. I also put up a little exhibition of photographs on the role of the Indian armed forces until 1947, which I had picked out from a larger exhibition that the British defence ministry had mounted.

The information and broadcasting ministry had earlier taken up cudgels to defend the cadre rights of information service personnel, for an acceptance of the recommendations in my report, 'Information as Defence: Media Relations in an Instant World', would have meant their having to face competition from the uniformed services and the open market. And there the matter stalled until overtaken by events. Jaswant Singh went back to the foreign ministry as George Fernandes was restored to his earlier charge. Arun Singh and I demitted our respective consultancies in the defence ministry, with critics taking pot shots at both in Parliament. The events of 9/11 and the disturbances in Gujarat followed. An opportune moment went by. Inertia returned.

The interlude in the defence ministry was, however, interesting and I saw a current book of mine, *Reorienting India: The New Geo-Politics of Asia*,* through the press. Jaswant Singh was good enough to release it. The purpose was to reorient India's gaze to a new unfolding that recalled the country's rich globalised past when, with China, it had been one of the world's two dominant economic powers, until AD 1700. The end of the Cold War and the roll back of international Communism together with the Asian economic miracle and other modernising growth impulses had seen the emergence of a new geo-political architecture in Asia that was shaping what promised to be an Asian Century. The volume addressed the challenges confronting India and the role that it could play.

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*Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2001.

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I was now ready to take off on a long holiday abroad with Jamila. But before we left, the al Qaeda 9/11 terror strike against the US traumatised Americans, who had never before experienced an attack on their homeland. We were glued to the television in Delhi and witnessed the graphic drama unfold, as the twin towers came down in flames after hijacked airliners plunged into them in a suicide attack. We commenced our holiday later that month, motoring through Scotland with cousins and revisiting Cambridge. Then on to Chicago, to spend time with our younger son and daughter-in-law, Rahul and Jamuna, and their two girls, Diya and Naina, and drive with them through the Midwest to Yellowstone Park, Jackson Hole and other national parks, ski resorts, Denver and the Rockies. Jamila and I then went on to New York and Washington and, finally, to Los Angeles, catching up with old friends and numerous members of the family, scattered across the country.

We crossed the Pacific to Hong Kong, via Taiwan, to spend Christmas and New Year with my son, Vijay, his wife Bina and our grandson, Kanishk, before returning home with a stopover in Singapore. It was good catching up with the children and, in particular, to be able to spend time with our three grandchildren. Rahul had acquired a taste for marathon running, skiing and adventure, and I shall never forget camping out with him and Naina in a forest near Yellowstone Park, shivering under bundles of woollens and down sleeping bags, and having to get up several times to go to the loo, with only a torch to fight off brown bears. Vijay was busy building his on-line travel magazine *Smart Travel Asia*, while Kanishk played cricket for the Hong Kong under-fifteens.

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Barely had we got home, early in the new year of 2002, when disaster struck in the form of the awful Godhra train burning and Gujarat massacre. India has witnessed much communal violence, the 1984 killings of Sikhs in Delhi being one of the worst. Yet the Gujarat pogrom against Muslims through February-April 2002 and even later was an act of barbarism never before witnessed in post-independent India, with state complicity and a deliberate plan to thwart investigation, prosecution and justice and with responsibility sloughed off, as far as possible, for relief, rehabilitation and compensation for the victims. Typifying the brutal callousness of the state was the chief minister, Narendra Modi's chilling statement that those seeking peace should not ask for justice, as that could only add fuel to the fire.

The Editors Guild of India instituted a fact-finding mission. Dileep Padgaonkar (*The Times of India*), Akar Patel (*Mid-Day*, Mumbai) and I

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were to report on the role of the media which, on the one hand, had been accused of instigating and fanning the violence, and yet had had to face impediments and threats in the discharge of its professional duty. We visited Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Godhra, Anand and Vadodara, met the key actors and submitted our report, 'Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat', on 3 May 2002. We had read about the horror of what had happened in Gujarat. But visiting Naroda Patya, Gulberg and other sites of violence etched them deep in memory, as we were shown the burnt shells of houses and read wretchedness and despair in the eyes of those crowded in camps, which the government was anxious to close as quickly as possible.

Overnight, the historic and revered seventeenth century dargah of Wali Gujarati, who symbolised a long tradition of syncretism and fraternal harmony, had been razed—'for road widening', it was said—and two mornings later, the city's traffic was running over the newly tarred road laid over it. No one was held responsible for this act of gross vandalism. There was no inquiry. A precious cultural landmark was obliterated. Similarly, the grave of the famous and much loved Baroda court musician, Ustad Fayyaz Khan, was desecrated in Vadodara.

When we met Narendra Modi, he had no explanation to offer and showed no contrition. Neither he nor the senior officials attending on him were able to defend anything—the blatant incitement to violence and falsification of the news by sections of the mainline Gujarati press—*Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar*, in particular; the deliberate failure of the police to respond to repeated calls for assistance by Eshan Jafri, a former Congress MP, who ultimately perished with many others in Gulberg at the hands of a baying mob; the fact that two sitting Muslim judges in Ahmedabad were threatened and had to flee their homes, the residence of one being attacked and burnt; the prompt transfer on 'promotion' of officials who did their duty and prevented violence and bloodshed in Rajkot and Bhavnagar; or the vandalising of two minority-related offices within the protected precincts of the Old Secretariat in Gandhinagar, just opposite the chief minister's office.

Modi justified the presence of two of his ministers in the Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar police control rooms, and described this as standard practice in Gujarat as it was a convenient place from which to interact with the public! Critics, however, were of the view that the mobs were directed from there. Official interlocutors could not explain reports that a minister's son was present in one of those control rooms. They merely informed us that no action could be taken unless an FIR was filed. None had dared to do so!

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The stock argument we heard from the government and those who were unapologetic about the carnage was that the holocaust had been triggered by the burning of two coaches of the Sabarmati Express, in which fifty-eight kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya had been roasted alive at Godhra station, allegedly by a Muslim mob. This was described by Modi and others as a deliberate act of Muslim terror that aroused a strong reaction, especially as this had not been adequately condemned by the so-called pseudo-secular forces. Other sources, however, attributed the burning of the Sabarmati Express to misbehaviour by the kar sevaks and an accidental fire possibly caused during the melee.

The Bannerjee Committee, which was appointed by the Railways, later concluded that the fire was accidental, but the (main and ongoing) Nanavati Commission of Inquiry into the Godhra-Gujarat incidents thereafter took a contrary view in its preliminary report. Even assuming that some Muslim miscreants had burnt the two coaches, how could innocent Muslim men, women and children in other parts of Gujarat be held vicariously liable? They were not merely reviled but systematically decimated by the hundreds, their houses and work places set afire, and their livelihoods destroyed, while many were forced into ghettoes, subjected to economic boycott and demonised. Such a methodical and sustained campaign scarcely appeared spontaneous.

As a member of the Guild team, I was in Ahmedabad's Circuit House, where we had called individual witnesses and associations to give evidence. Together with a Gujarat Information Directorate official, I was awaiting the arrival of my other two colleagues when there was a commotion outside and a group of six to eight Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists broke in shouting and gesticulating, jostling those present and accusing us of hatching a dark conspiracy behind closed doors. The Gujarat Information Department official explained that I was a member of an Editor's Guild fact-finding team, whereupon those rowdies turned on me, insistently demanding to know whether I was a Muslim or a Hindu.

I replied, '*Main Hindustani hu,*' and asked to know their names and purpose. They refused to identify themselves and kept shouting, '*Hum Hindu hai.*' When told that our team was going to Gandhinagar the following day to meet ministers and officials, they derisively retorted that they were the 'ministers' we should meet. I said we would be glad to hear their point of view too. They gradually simmered down and finally stated that they were angered by media denigration of the majority community. They said we should meet their leaders and gave us the mobile numbers of their general secretaries, Jaydeep Patel and

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Kaushik Mehta, whom we visited a couple of days later. They disowned the people who had met us earlier, stating that the VHP was so popular that everybody was using its name! Before leaving, they presented us with a bunch of the most inflammatory photographs of the Godhra carnage and subsequent events, which they had obviously been passing around. Word of the Circuit House incident had travelled to the police commissioner, who sent a DCP and a posse of policemen to ask if we wished to file a formal complaint and seek police protection. We politely declined both offers.

We had asked to see the government press notes, statements and appeals issued during the troubled period. The language used for Hindus and Muslims and for Gujarat and Godhra were strikingly different—one emollient, the other vitriolic. A press note issued on the evening of the Sabarmati Express incident, spoke of a 'pre-planned, inhuman, collective violent act of terrorism'. Modi referred to Pakistan's 'clandestine role behind the Godhra genocide'. His subsequent comments sought to equate Muslims with Pakistanis and, in popular parlance, the lines dividing Muslim and Hindu mohallas were described as 'borders' and the Muslim quarters as 'Pakistan'. Recalling the 'barbarous, savage, devilish, demonic' torching of the Sabarmati Express, Modi said, 'Gujarat shall not tolerate any such incident. The culprits will get full punishment for their sins. Not only this; we shall set an example that nobody, not even in his dreams, thinks of committing a heinous crime like this.'

The Hindutva hate campaign was not hidden. It was there to see. One press note boasted that Narendra Modi—described as 'Chhote Sardar'—had 'restored peace' to Ahmedabad in only seventy-two hours. The chief minister assured the trading community that Resurgent Gujarat would soon resume its onward march. The Union home minister, L.K. Advani, also gave Modi a certificate for the deft handling of the situation. He visited Gujarat on 4 March, when a press note quoted him as saying 'the Godhra genocide had given a setback to the four years of peaceful BJP rule in Gujarat'. Not a word about the Gujarat pogrom, the pitiable state of relief and rehabilitation in which the government was a late and reluctant partner, nor a word of sympathy for the victims. Posters and handbills spread venom, while cell phones and city cable networks propagated rumours, fear and hate.

The full and frank coverage of the Gujarat holocaust by the national media and sections of the local media alerted and galvanised public opinion. The National Human Rights Commission, in turn, under the inspiring leadership of Justice J.S. Verma, did a splendid job, constantly prodding the Gujarat government to stop dissembling and do more.

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The national media, however, failed in one respect. No paper or channel issued an appeal for funds for the relief of the victims and NGOs supporting them. They alerted the public through their reportage, but did not encourage or help people to reach out to those in distress and need.

One man was not pleased—Atal Behari Vajpayee. The prime minister expressed sorrow and reminded Narendra Modi of his raj dharma. He was all for removing Modi from office through a resolution to be moved at the Goa session of the BJP. He was vetoed by the RSS and the party. Modi remained.

The Gujarat (Nanavati) Commission of Inquiry is still at work, but in November 2007, *Tehelka* magazine in a sting operation got many of the leading BJP and Hindutva actors on camera boasting about their exploits to Ashish Khetan posing as Piyush Agarwal, a research scholar from Delhi University, writing a thesis on Hindutva in Gujarat. He had visited MS University, Baroda, to do a story on the vandalising of the famed Fine Arts Faculty earlier that year and, in the course of that assignment, got leads on the Gujarat carnage of 2002, with one boastful Bajrang Dal or VHP or Parivar leader leading him on to another. Now was the time to speak and speak they did, each compromising and confirming the guilt of the other across the board and exposing the mala fides involved in the police investigation, in a bid to thwart justice. 'The Truth of Gujarat 2002 in the Words of the Men Who Did It' came out as a special issue of *Tehelka*, dated November 2007. It was nothing short of a bombshell. It was too well-documented to have been faked, as alleged. The effect was numbing.

While one deplored the barbarity and savagery of the attacks on a helpless minority, there were many stories of individual courage and compassion, as Hindus gave shelter and succour to their Muslim neighbours, or even strangers, and vice versa, despite risks. Many professionals, academics, NGOs and Gandhians banded together to provide relief and rehabilitation, intercede on behalf of the victims, organise their legal defence and raise money for their cause. Later, men like Professor J.S. Bandukwala of Baroda University whose house was attacked, and Hasan Jowher, a young Ahmedabad businessman, devoted themselves to promoting reconciliation and brotherhood with admirable dedication and devotion, not hesitating to point conservative sections of their own community in the direction of reform and liberal advocacy.

I put together a group under Inder Gujral, former prime minister, Justice Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of India, and others drawn from all walks of life and different parts of the country in a Forum for

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Reconciliation and Fraternity (FRF), which met periodically in Gujral's house to take stock of the developments in Gujarat, and interact with others to end the madness and restore amity.

Sometime in February 2002, the prime minister had decided that it would be useful to send two small non-official delegations to the East and West coasts of America to canvas for better Indo-US relations with policy makers, think-tanks, academics and the media, on issues pertaining to the Asia-Pacific security environment, J&K and the neighbourhood. Shankar Bajpai, a former ambassador to the US, Rafiq Zakaria, a Congress politician and writer from Mumbai, and I were approached to visit Washington, New York and Chicago. We had agreed in principle. I now received a formal letter from the foreign secretary, Chokila Iyer, setting up a briefing meeting with her minister, Jaswant Singh, preparatory to the visit, and informing us that there would be a de-briefing session with the prime minister on our return.

Gujarat had, however, created an altogether new situation, and we were not convinced that the Union government had acted promptly and purposefully to stem the rot. Shankar and I met Jaswant Singh and explained that we would find it difficult to answer questions on Gujarat that were bound to be asked, unless the government were to state categorically that what had happened was an aberration which was deeply regretted, and that firm action was being taken to punish the guilty and restore confidence. Jaswant argued that this could be presumed, but we said we had seen no evidence of that. On the other hand, the Gujarat government was unrepentant and even exuded a sense of triumph. Jaswant was disappointed. The visit was aborted.

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The sense of disquiet among liberals was not eased by trends tending towards the saffronisation of education. There had long been arguments about the quality and content of school textbooks, but matters came to a head with the formulation of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, NCFSE 2000, by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which was adopted by the Centre amidst controversy. Aruna Roy, a well-known social worker, Meena Radhakrishna Tyabji, a sociologist, and I filed a public interest litigation writ in the Supreme Court.

The argument was that the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) made up of state education ministers had not been consulted, and that revisions were being made in history and social study textbooks, without reference to the original authors. In consequence, the curriculum

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and syllabus for schools were being oriented towards promoting the political and religious ideology of sections of the government. History was being re-written. For instance, in the 'Ancient India' text for Class VI, by Romila Thapar, the following line had been deleted: 'In fact, for special guests, beef was served as a matter of honour (although in later centuries, Brahmins were forbidden to eat beef)'. In listing national festivals, only Hindu festivals had been mentioned. The Indus Valley civilisation or Harappan culture had been re-named 'Saraswati-Sindhu culture' (and an annual Saraswati-Sindhu festival was being promoted on the banks of the Indus near Leh). Vedic mathematics was being introduced in schools, and Sanskrit was to be made compulsory from the primary level, in disregard of pedagogical principles.

The prayer to the court was that the National Curriculum Framework be struck down, deletions made in textbooks be declared unreasonable and arbitrary, and syllabi be revised in consultation with experts in a transparent manner. The petition aroused furious national controversy among historians, parents, teachers, academics, administrators and policy makers. At an NCERT meeting in May 2002, fourteen out of twenty-four state education ministers walked out in protest, demanding that the NCFSE be held in abeyance till CABE was convened to review the matter.

The three-judge bench gave its ruling in September. It held that CABE was not a statutory body, and since its membership was similar to that of the NCERT, the adoption of the new curriculum framework by the latter, by a majority decision, could not be disregarded. It further held that 'value education' or instruction about religions was different from religious education and, hence, not violative of Article 28, provided all faiths were treated with equal respect. It saw no reason to object to the teaching of Sanskrit, a scheduled language, or Vedic astronomy (not astrology).

The judgment did not uphold our plea, but our PIL had amply served its purpose by triggering a national debate and review. Mistakes in the new textbooks were corrected and public awareness stimulated.

The saffron attack was largely directed against leftist historians whom the NDA education minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, charged with propagating inaccurate history through 'intellectual terrorism'. Romila Thapar argued that the Parivar was attempting to falsify and glorify a certain narrative of history in order to prove theories on which the Hindutva ideology was based. Thus the insistence on the utmost antiquity and historical primacy of Vedic culture, and a distinctive Aryan people who inhabited India and brought civilisation to all other peoples.

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Hindutva historians in turn described the exercise as not 'rewriting' but 'revisiting' history.

India certainly does have a very rich history. The problem lies in making this exclusive rather than inclusive, treating subsequent or parallel traditions, particularly the Islamic stream, as extraneous, polluting and foreign, thus denying the very diversity that has shaped the idea of India. It is this narrow Hindutva history that is embodied in the books prepared and distributed by the RSS chain of Saraswati Shishu Mandir and Vidya Bharati schools. According to one of these texts, India's independence struggle began 2500 years ago, while the Qutab Minar was actually built by Samudragupta and originally known as Vishnu Stambha.

As the debate, post-Gujarat, acquired edge and momentum and, moreover, began to be punctuated by disturbing events and trends, I penned a series of articles that appeared in *The Tribune*, titled, 'The Indian Idea; Towards Fraternity'. I lamented the tragedy and farce inherent in the fact that Hindutva forces should now seek regressively to validate the discredited two-nation theory (first enunciated by Savarkar in 1927). I argued that the task at hand now must be to mend India. Why should a section of Parivar Hindus feel oppressed and inferior when they are so obviously part of the dominant majority and ruling elite? Why this warped self-image, the lurking grudge and retreat into the dim past when it is the future that beckoned?

Indian secularism had been hollowed out as a result of vote-bank politics, a ceding of authority even in secular matters to clerics of all hues, many of them inimical to or fearful of modernisation, the failure to distinguish religion from the far broader concept of culture, and the absence of social reformers after Gandhi, Vinoba, Ambedkar and, maybe, in a more limited sense, Jayaprakash Narayan. The word 'minority', which should essentially represent an attitude rather than numbers, had pushed minority rights or 'minorityism' too far. Reservations, though still necessary, had become a crutch without an exit policy, with millions fighting to be declared more and yet more backward, in an extraordinary social and political regression.

Caste panchayats remained as strong as ever. Dalits continued to face discrimination and were subjected to atrocities. What to speak of the bizarre claim that the Gujarat carnage that brought fear, anxiety and shame to the nation should be hailed as a triumph of Hindu 'consolidation' and 'reawakening' and a narrative of innocent victimhood and revenge.

The issue of conversions that led to the ghastly murder of the

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Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two sons in Orissa, had roused Hindutva passions and a string of illiberal and, essentially, impractical laws (such as all conversions be notified to and cleared by district magistrates).

While in Gandhinagar in 2002, I asked Narendra Modi and his leading officials, if they could furnish details of any illegal conversions by force or fraud in Gujarat, as indignantly alleged from time to time. They failed to name a single case as did the two joint general secretaries of the VHP. Forcible and fraudulent conversion of any variety, including the so-called ghar-vapsi (spiritual homecoming) are wrong, and the activities of some of the new (especially North American) charismatic churches are offensive and unacceptable, and need to be suitably dealt with through other more appropriate means.

Dalit and tribal frustration and anger over an unjust status quo were manifest in the Bhopal Declaration that preceded the World Social Conference on Discrimination and Peace, held in Durban in January 2002. The declaration charted a course for Dalits in the twenty-first century, and called for 'a new social consensus' to redeem the unfulfilled constitutional pledges to do justice to Dalits. The tribal condition too remains far from satisfactory and is the underlying cause of the Naxalite unrest, of which the law and order situation is merely the outward manifestation. These constitute a vital part of the social agenda that must be vigorously addressed.

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THE PROFESSOR WILL SEE YOU NOW

I joined the Centre for Policy Research in 1986 after demitting office as editor of *The Indian Express* and discovered I had become a Professor, in accordance with the Delhi University rules that the CPR followed. Professor sounded very grand, but I was not sure quite what I was supposed to profess. Until the age of sixty-five, I was a Research Professor. Thereafter, I became an Honorary Professor. Still later, when I ceased having any programme at the CPR and began working out of home and only attending Monday faculty meetings—intellectually convivial occasions garnished with much argument and analysis over coffee—I was more appropriately designated a Visiting Professor. I continue to visit more than profess.

The CPR had been built up by Pai Panandiker into one of the country's foremost think-tanks, with an interesting mix of younger academics, retired administrators, diplomats and professionals, and government servants on a sabbatical between assignments. The centre focuses on policy issues over a broad canvas, and selects potential scholars around their core expertise or interests. I, for example, was anxious to fill out my ideas and work on river waters and, subsequently, the North-east, and was invited to do this at the CPR. While working on any issue, one was free to write columns, participate in seminars, travel in India or abroad and do other things. Everything was treated as work as, in Pai's belief, these were all inputs to the CPR's intellectual corpus. There was total academic freedom, and most were

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guided by an innate sense of responsibility to deliver a book, monograph or paper.

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I already had a some insight and background with regard to the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna/Barak (GBM) basin with a population of around 480 million in 1990 (maybe 600 million today), some 72 million hectares of arable land, and a volume of water second only to that carried by the Amazon, with a huge hydro-electric potential. It also had a proven record as a key waterway spread over eastern India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and part of Tibet.

Yet here was poverty amidst plenty. Obviously, the GBM basin could be a drag or a driver. It was also obvious that the key to optimal development of this shared resource in order to minimise floods, beat drought and harness the available energy in a sustainable manner was through regional cooperation rather than a beggar-my-neighbour policy. India's role would be critical not merely because it was far and away the largest partner, but in view of its relative financial and technological clout and position.

Partition had left the North-east, which accounts for a third of the country's total water resources and hydel potential, virtually land-locked. The Brahmaputra, Barak and Karnafuli (flowing from Mizoram through the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the port of Chittagong) constitute traditional arterial waterways linking the North-east to the Indian heartland and the Indian Ocean. Nepal and Bhutan are completely landlocked while almost 95 per cent of Bangladesh's waters originate in India, which holds the high ground required for effectively harnessing or managing the rivers before they debouch on to the flat Bengal plain to become wide, braided, meandering watercourses.

A look at the map would have revealed obvious geo-strategic compulsions that should have dictated diplomacy and planning. That did not happen. I do believe that few of our policy makers have ever looked at a map of India and its neighbours in sixty years. All of India's frontier cartography is top secret and high politics continues to be conducted in a state of cartographic illiteracy, with even elementary geography having been devalued educationally as a discipline.

This is no snide remark. Whether it is the geo-political location of the North-east, or talk of the Chinese diverting the Brahmaputra northwards, or Siachen, or regional or urban planning, this illiteracy is writ large. The consequences in the GBM context were certainly unhappy. Following the Indo-Pakistan Canal Water dispute in 1948 and the negotiations that

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led to the Indus Treaty a decade later, Pakistan asserted its right to its historic use of the Indus waters. It never occurred to India to do likewise in respect of the eastern rivers. On the contrary, the Barcelona Convention on inland navigation of international waterways, to which India and the successor state of (East) Pakistan were signatories, was formally denounced by Delhi in 1956, as Nepal had described the Ganges as an international river, which it is.

Thus we unilaterally gave up our legal right to navigation on the international waters of the lower Ganges/Padma, Brahmaputra, Barak/Meghna and Karnafuli, with an outlet to the sea at Chittagong. We are still paying the price of that folly. No one in the government sets too much store on inland navigation and this low-cost, ecologically sound mode of transport has been systematically killed by the railways and road transport, under governmental auspices. The specially built Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) navigation canals were never operated while the Farakka navigation lock has been scarcely used since it was opened in 1975, barring the triumphal carriage of some outsize cargo as a one-off operation, on rare occasions.

I travelled throughout the GBM basin, barring Tibet, and interacted with policy makers, engineers, farmers, foresters, meteorologists, geologists, seismologists and specialists of every kind, most of whom were extraordinarily generous with their time and eager to share their knowledge. It was a hugely enriching learning experience, and much of what I communicated in *Waters of Hope* was, in a way, their story. By the mid-1990s the landmark Mahakali and Ganges Treaties had been signed, but the political situation in Nepal and Bangladesh and their relations with India came in the way of real progress.

There were certain concepts I kept pressing. The first related to the opportunity cost of delay. The second was the proposition that nature is changing and fickle, and that part of the 'natural order' people point to is actually the result of human intervention. This argument needs to be advanced to repel the environmental fallacy that all nature is necessarily pristine and has remained inviolate. A third proposition was that in certain situations damage to the environment has resulted as much from lack of development as from development. And finally, while it is glibly said that it would be best not to do something owing to its forbidding cost, not to decide or to preserve the status quo is itself a decision that carries a cost of not doing.

The 1980s and 1990s were decades of strong environmental pleading that was sometimes carried to extremes, corresponding to the indifference or arrogance of compulsive dam-builders on the other side. The Sardar

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Sarovar Project (SSP) on the Narmada, the Tehri Dam on the Bhagirathi-Ganga in Garhwal and the Indira Gandhi (Rajasthan) Canal were taken as test cases.

The courts intervened. Global environmentalists descended on India to man the barricades alongside Arundhati Roy, the well-known author. The Narmada Planning Group led by Yoginder Alagh and others argued the case for well-planned water resource development under close monitoring. I was a strong supporter of the SSP which, properly handled and with its enormously significant water-supply component could, I thought, transform Gujarat. Taking a cue from a Harvard University discussion entitled 'For lack of interest, tomorrow is cancelled', I did a piece answering the IRM's critique on behalf of the Gujarat Government, titled, 'No Cancelling Tomorrow'.

In 1979, the Narmada Tribunal's award ended a long-standing inter-state dispute and apportioned the estimated annual flow of water in the river to Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Gujarat received the largest share of the benefits—1.8 million hectares of irrigation and 1.06 MAF of water for domestic and industrial use and some power. Power benefits were largely to go to Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, but the former also suffered the largest quantum of displacement and submergence. The tribunal's award included a long-term basin development programme envisaging thirty major dams, including the Indira Sagar Dam in MP, and many more medium and minor dams, all in Madhya Pradesh but for Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat.

By any standard this was a heroic endeavour, with the SSP promising what was to be the largest irrigation command and drinking water supply system in the world, in an acutely drought prone region, and with very considerable potential for reservoir fishery and, if so determined, inland navigation. On the other hand, nearly 35,000 hectares of land would be submerged by the SSP, a third of this river-bed and wasteland, and the rest farmland and forest, in roughly equal proportions, displacing about 100,000 people in 248 villages, almost entirely inhabited by Bhil tribals. Three villages would be completely submerged, and the rest partially, in varying degrees. Figures of costs, benefits, submergence and displacement would be contested. Construction would be an engineering feat and the command area development set a new standard in sophistication under the guidance of the Narmada Planning Group.

The World Bank funded the resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) package that offered each displaced person, coparcener, agricultural labourer, encroacher, major son (and daughter in Maharashtra) a minimum of two hectares of land of his/her choice in the command

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area in addition to a homestead plot, and compensation and resettlement in kinship clusters in R&R villages, with certain assured utilities and services. Landowners losing larger holdings would be entitled to equivalent compensation in terms of land. The guiding principle was that the 'oustee' should be at least as well off, if not better placed, at the end of the day. Issues of canal displacement, secondary displacement and direct and indirect livelihood losses were also raised and the R&R package saw steady improvement.

At the time the award was announced, acquisition of degraded forests and wasteland was permissible. But with the passage of the Forest Conservation Act in 1980, this option was foreclosed and recourse could only be had to farmland. The rules of the game had drastically changed. Further, Maharashtra and MP 'oustees' were given the option of resettlement in Gujarat. Land for land in crowded farmlands with a growingly adverse land-man ratio in view of population pressures was, in the circumstances, a false promise, and the alternative of cash compensation was seen as foul play.

Medha Patkar took up the cause, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), which she spearheaded, was soon in the vanguard of systematic and even coercive opposition. More reasonable voices such as those of ARCH-Vahini, another NGO, were drowned in the clamour, which was taken up internationally, in keeping with the rising tide of organised environmental activism against large dams and projects. The prevalent development-growth paradigm, supported by the World Bank until then was challenged, and the SSP became a test case and cause celebre.

The SSP was caught on an escalator of evolving World Bank and MoEF environmental and R&R norms. A rattled bank president stepped in to send out an International Review Mission (IRM) with a wholly North American membership under Bradford Morse, which many Indians accused of bias and lack of understanding. The mission concluded that the SSP was virtually 'impossible', triggering huge acrimony all round with dharnas, marches, fasts, petitions and national and international pressure to stop the SSP, which was labelled a planned environmental disaster, an engine of tribal genocide, a human rights crime and a gigantic hoax.

'No Cancelling Tomorrow' rebutted the IRM's findings and theories of development. I cited the controversies surrounding the Aswan High Dam, which has on balance clearly proved a life-saver for Egypt. I also pointed to the fact that in the Narmada Valley as in Garhwal, where the Tehri Dam is situated, distress migration had spawned 'Malthusian refugees', deserted villages and the 'feminisation' of the working force,

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as in Garhwal's famous 'Chipko' villages, where women hugged trees to prevent their commercial felling, as the men were away in the plains eking out a livelihood. Annual distress migration in India was estimated at around thirty to forty million, just prior to the inauguration of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Short-term tunnel vision often ignores the high social and political costs of non-development over space and time. This is not to deny shortcomings in some R&R packages and their implementation, but to plead for improvements and a more holistic vision.

I carried the argument further in *Winning the Future*,* where I examined the controversies surrounding the Narmada and Tehri Dams and the Rajasthan Canal, which carries Himalayan snow and glacier melt from the Beas and Ravi to transform the western Rajasthan desert and quench the thirst of millions of humans and livestock. In the case of the Tehri Dam, where dam safety and sedimentation factors were advanced, a series of tests by experts put dam safety and rim stability beyond all reasonable doubt of risk from tectonic events. Next, sants and sadhus were invoked to oppose the dam on the ground that it would impede the natural flow of the sacred Ganga. R&R issues were also raised. Ultimately, the project went ahead and has helped stabilise and augment irrigation in the UP plains. It also provides much needed power and helps meet part of Delhi's municipal water deficit. The Upper Ganga and Yamuna Valleys are now seeing cascade development of successive schemes on a single stream, though not without renewed objections.

Visiting the Rajasthan Canal or Indira Gandhi Nahar (IGN) was a fascinating experience. One saw the desert being brought to life. The Indus Treaty allowed the Pong and Ranjit Sagar Dams to be built on the Beas and Ravi, which feed the IGN. Stage I of the canal was complete but some waterlogging had ensued as much of Rajasthan's quota of 'Indus' waters was diverted into it so as to prevent Punjab appropriating this temporary 'surplus'. This, however, was the result of politics, not irrigation engineering.

South-east beyond Jodhpur towards Barmer, a hard pan of gypsum below the ground prevents the percolation of water, and excessive irrigation and faulty crop patterns can, therefore, cause waterlogging and salinity. The canal command was uninhabited but for nomadic herdsmen. Initially, the Pong Dam 'oustees' from the cool heights of Himachal, and marginalised and landless communities with no capacity for entrepreneurial and pioneering cultivation were settled there. But

*Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1994.

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despite the laudable social objectives, that proved to be a mistake. These issues are, however, being debated and addressed. The strategic benefit of a defensive water ditch along the sparsely populated Pakistan border was a side benefit which accrued from the project.

The Rajasthan Canal has already paid for itself. The transformation effected is evident. Chinkaras gambol and peacocks dance beside the canal.

Coming to the Bhakra Nangal, here was a large project over thirty years old (which was the period, critics forecast, within which the disastrous nature of the SSP and Tehri Dam would ostensibly be laid bare). Bhakra has, instead, transformed Punjab and Haryana, supplied Delhi with drinking water, energised industry and the groundwater lift that underpinned the Green Revolution and ended the demeaning ship-to-mouth dependence on US PL 480 foodgrains. What would India have been minus the Bhakra? Yes, the impact has been negative in some areas, and the over-fertilisation, over-irrigation and the perpetuation of the paddy-wheat cycle, for instance, has led to soil exhaustion. These are gradually being corrected through diversification.

The critics would not give up. Fasts and threats of *jal samarpan* (death by drowning) in the rising Naramada flood waters became a ritual. It was emotional blackmail in a democratic society. The World Bank slowly came back from the cold after co-sponsoring with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a World Commission on Dams with Medha Patkar as a member. The commission came to conclusions that would render clearance for any large dam a nightmare if not a virtual impossibility under proposed protocols that soon sank into oblivion without a trace.* My rejoinder 'Poetic Licence' said, 'The poetry was charming. The facts wrong. More rhyme than reason. There she was at the barricades proclaiming that "big dams are to a nation's development what nuclear arms are to its military arsenal . . . weapons of mass destruction . . . The Indian state/democracy is a pestilential poverty producing machine made to order by rich urban elites to grind down the rural poor".'

The matter did not end there. The controversy continued. Much delay was caused by litigation and stay orders on the ground that the undertaking given to complete R&R and environmental measures with each metre-rise in the height of the dam to the level where irrigation and added power benefits would commence, and beyond, was being violated.

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*Arundhati Roy once again sounded the trumpet call in a long essay, 'The Greater Common Good', *Outlook Magazine*, Delhi, 5 July 1999.

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The Ministry of Water Resources set up two monitoring groups on the environmental impact of the project and R&R. I was named a member of the environmental group and we plodded forward, pushing for compliance by all concerned, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, regarding compensatory afforestation, catchment area treatment, command area development, health measures, fisheries, protection of cultural monuments, establishment of wildlife parks, dam safety, guaranteeing minimum ecological flows to maintain the health of the estuarine regime, and so forth.

It was slow going, and there appeared to be a growing sense of desperation among opponents of the project to prevent the achievement of the critical dam height, as once benefits started flowing the psychological environment would change. Objection was taken to Madhya Pradesh offering cash compensation. This was being readily accepted in lieu of land-for-land R&R, particularly by families in partially submerged villages. The greening of the project area was spectacularly achieved, with anything from 100 to 500 trees being planted for every tree lost.

Came the day, amidst much jubilation, when water started flowing in the SSP Main Canal. The Sabarmati at Ahmedabad, long dry in the lean season, began to flow attracting thousands of picnickers and tourists, who came just to see the precious water. A drinking water scheme was put in place, bringing relief to countless others. The pay-off had, at last, begun. It must, however, be said that the long delay in raising the height of the dam had slowed down the construction of the distributaries and minor canals in the more arid regions of North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch. The completion of vertical drainage works, including tubewells, and the establishment of water user societies, cooperatively, to manage irrigation below the farm gate has been delayed, thus skewing planned irrigation benefits and cropping patterns. These are certainly matters for concern, and are yet to be fully corrected.

Elsewhere, water disputes remained the bane of farmers and policy makers. Passions ran high in the sharing of the Ravi-Beas waters between Punjab and Haryana and the construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal. There was even more acrimony over the sharing of the Cauvery waters, primarily between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The latter believed that it had got a poor deal from the Raj as a princely state in contention with the then Madras Presidency. The Cauvery Tribunal Award was not notified for fear of rejection and ad hoc inter-state accords and proposals to set up a Cauvery River Authority proved infructuous.

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A good part of the problem here lies in Tamil Nadu's insistence on engaging in wasteful flood irrigation and on sustaining the Thanjavur delta's paddy-paddy-paddy cycle, even as Karnataka insists on growing paddy and sugarcane in Mandya, both highly water intensive crops. If half the energy devoted to polemics had been devoted to modernisation of antiquated irrigation systems and more sensible cropping patterns, the issue may well have been resolved by now. This has been a problem countrywide because of the failure to modernise water delivery and management systems. Besides, sufficient attention has not been paid to drainage, demand management, pricing and other key elements. India has the largest irrigation system in the world, but not the most efficient or cost-effective. Politics has also intervened with water and electricity giveaways in the name of the poor, who are the ultimate losers as large farmers can use bigger and deeper pumps, and free irrigation entails poor system maintenance and asset deterioration.

In any event, exasperation with the unending Cauvery dispute impelled the Supreme Court, as an obiter dicta, to pursue a chance reference by one of the parties that the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) had been, for some time, studying the possibility of constructing a national water grid as a more savvy variant of the proposed Ganga-Cauvery Link, mooted in the late 1960s, by the engineer-minister Dr K.L. Rao. This was followed by a romantic but environmentally and technically ill-conceived proposal by an airline pilot, Captain Dastur, to capture and redistribute all the waters of India in two gigantic Himalayan and Peninsular Garland Canals. This abandoned, the MoWR set up a National Water Development Agency (NWDA) in 1982, to develop a long-term plan to transfer water from 'surplus' to 'drought' basins, regionally and nationally, over space and time. This the NWDA had since done in consultation with the states, and undertaken studies to conceptualise the transfer of 'surplus' water from the east and north to the drier north-west and south, calculated to irrigate an additional 35 million hectares of land and generate 34,000 MW of power over a 45-year period at a notional cost of Rs 560,000 crores.

The Supreme Court suggested that the NWDA study be pulled out of the drawer, dusted and implemented. Despite this being pure obiter dicta and not an order, the NDA government under Vajpayee took it as a binding ruling. It set up a task force for the Inter-Linking of Rivers or ILR (an untidy and misleading title) under Suresh Prabhu, a dynamic former power minister, and I was a member of this.

The National Commission on Water Resource Development and Planning earlier set up by MoWR under Professor S.R. Hashim (of

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which, again, I was a member) had come up with a plan of action for integrated water resource development for India. In its report, it referred to the possibility of large-scale inter-basin transfers, but called for further studies and consultation. The commission also estimated the availability of water against population projects for 2050. It concluded that the water available by then would be barely adequate to meet requirements, as agricultural, municipal, industrial and ecological uses would increase sharply. This called for a whole range of irrigation, crop management and land reforms and technological innovation.

On my insistence, the international dimensions of Himalayan water resource development in India was taken up for study. The report of this sub-group that I headed collated all of India's international water treaties and engagements and future prospects, examined water law and pointed to possible future directions such as harnessing the energy potential of the Brahmaputra U-bend and initiating future cooperation in optimising the utilisation of the full potential of the Indus, in an Indus-II joint cooperation protocol, which the MoWR was chary of even mentioning.

The ILR task force was intended to review the work of the NWDA, prepare detailed project reports with corresponding environmental impact and R&R studies and harness the latest technological, construction and management practices to implement the approved aspects of the ILR with maximum benefits and efficiency and least harm.

No sooner had the ILR task force been announced than there was a raging national and international campaign denouncing it on environmental, displacement and economic considerations, and attributing technological arrogance, greed and ego on the part of the contractors and engineers. It found an even shriller echo of outrage in Bangladesh and Nepal on the ground that its impact on them had been disregarded although international rivers were involved. This, despite clarifications that of the thirty/thirty-one links proposed, the fourteen Himalayan (international river) links were not to be taken up for study at present for the very reasons cited, and that the focus would be exclusively on the peninsular rivers, which are wholly Indian.

One major misconception was that the ILR was a 'project', whereas it was clearly no more than a 'concept' awaiting detailed evaluation.

Another misconception pertained to the notion that trans-basin transfers were unknown and even unnatural, and that such a dangerous adventure that entailed 'changing geography' must be avoided. In fact, inter-basin transfers are well known and have long been practised, the very oldest example being the diversion of Yangtze water to the Yellow River and beyond to Peking through the Grand Canal, in 6 BC. Many

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more international examples can be cited. Nearer home, the west-flowing waters of the Periyar were dammed in the 1880s and diverted eastwards through Kerala's High Ranges to the Vaigai River to irrigate the parched lands of southern Tamil Nadu. The Indus waters make up the deficit of municipal supplies in Delhi (in the Yamuna basin), while the Rajasthan Canal, Krishna-Cuddapah Canal, Telugu-Ganga scheme and the Sardar Sarovar Project entail inter-basin transfers.

Further, no single proposal was going to move forward before the most detailed investigations and studies and broad federal, environmental, R&R, financial and a host of other approvals.

I wrote to the prime minister pointing out that a vast new commitment was being made to the ILR when a large number of ongoing water and hydro projects were languishing for lack of funds, leading to huge cost and time overruns. The answer lay in integrating all of these. More than this, the ILR suggested a methodology rather than an objective, which should be to insure the country against water stress and create a greener India.

Inter-linking should therefore be represented as only one among several strategies for greening India, the others being demand management and a national drive to harvest the rains and, thereafter, on an ascending scale from mini to mega watersheds in which the ILR could represent the apex of an integrated pyramid of actions at many levels—rural and urban, traditional and technologically-oriented, simple to complex, and immediate to long-term.

The government should, in conjunction with the states, municipalities and panchayats announce a national programme for water harvesting, watershed management and afforestation, the desilting of tanks, canals and water bodies to improve conveyance, local storage and recharge, restore and upgrade fisheries and spawning grounds, and enhance navigation by country craft by connecting beels, jheels and other water bodies, the excavated silt being used for building/repairing embankments, approach roads and elevated flood platforms.

Similar conservation and land improvement measures should be taken up in rain-fed areas to develop what the Chinese call farm-capital assets, much of it through the use of idle labour and food-for-work. These varied, decentralised activities, assisted by professional eco-battalions of ex-servicemen and student and urban volunteers could be mobilised in a National Conservation Corps for national service under Article 51A (g) of the Constitution. It is this notion that in a sense was later partially embodied in the current National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme.

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The ILR mobilised the country's best scientific, managerial and social science talents, institutions and agencies in designing new techniques of considering alternative models, sites and alignments and their related impacts, costs and benefits by using ISRO imagery and computer and mathematical modelling. This in itself represented an advance in project building. Only one detailed project report was sought, on Ken-Betwa, where it was hoped the consent of the governments concerned would be obtained. Fresh elections were held. The NDA fell and, for all practical purposes, ILR died with it.

*

The unwillingness to think, and think boldly out of the box, is a cardinal failing and represents a conservative mindset in a country that is striving for change. Two examples will suffice. During the great Bihar and eastern India famine of 1966-67, the government asked the US to depute some experts to assist in developing a groundwater programme. They visited India and hypothesised the likelihood of a large deep aquifer underlying the north Ganga plain.

This report lay in cold storage as relief projects revealed numerous shallow groundwater aquifers that could be easily tapped. Reporting on the dismal situation pertaining to agricultural productivity in eastern India, in 1984, the B.R. Sen Committee suggested a pilot exploration of this supposed deep aquifer before venturing to invest in far more expensive Himalayan storages. This too was disregarded but the World Bank and Paul Jones (a petro-geologist who had been part of the 1966-67 USAID team) persevered. He produced a series of papers over the next few years elaborating the deep aquifer thesis, whose credibility was enhanced in 1987 when the Oil and Natural Gas Commission's electro-logging and geological core samples, stored in Dehra Dun, confirmed the existence of a gigantic deep fresh water reservoir in several layers. It was further hypothesised that these deep aquifers were sustained by Himalayan recharge and were under artesian pressure which would eliminate pumping costs. It was estimated that the underlying aquifers between Faizabad and Purnea could possibly irrigate seventy million acres. There were separate deep aquifers, it was believed, in the Bengal Basin, the Tripura-Bangladesh plain and parts of Nepal.

The World Bank was prepared to fund an exploratory programme to establish all critical parameters but the government baulked. The thesis was queried and questions raised about mineralisation, subsidence and pumping costs. It was feared that confirmation of a deep aquifer would undermine the Indian stance on Ganga water sharing with Bangladesh

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below Farakka. I kept hawking the thesis and pleading for a modest pilot programme as the knowledge gained would enable the country to plan its water future more scientifically and cost-effectively, but to no avail.

The same ostrich-like attitude had been evident in the government's response to the US scientist Roger Revelle's thesis in the 1960s. He favoured summer cropping through the pumping of the aquifers along a number of Ganga tributaries, to deplete the water table and create underground pore space to absorb the first monsoon flood, both as a flood moderation strategy and in order to create large underground storages.

Later, after the second 'oil shock' when the world seemed headed for a recession, the US, EU, Japan and the World Bank called for a joint global pump-priming operation. Japan took the lead in establishing the Global Infrastructures Foundation (GIF) and came out with a shelf of mega projects, one of which entailed tapping the U-Bend of the Tsang-po as it swivels around Namche Barwa to descend 2500 metres in a giant cascade from Tibet, through Arunachal into Assam. A desktop map study done by the Electric Power Development Corporation (EPDC) of Japan, using US Noah satellite imagery indicated several dam sites. EPDC came up with estimates of the discharge, head and potential energy at each location plotted along the Tsang-po from south of Lhasa to the U-Bend and into Assam. Huge potentials were envisaged, the jewels in the crown being two alternative tunnel drops to divert the waters within the U-Bend from and to points within Tibet, a shorter alignment with a potential of 48,000 MW, and a longer 125-kilometre alignment from Tibet to Assam (exiting north of Jorhat), with a potential yield of 54,000 MW.

The EPDC proposed that China permit ground exploration. Beijing said it would be prepared to look at this proposal later. No one in India was interested and virtually the only person the EPDC could or did meet was myself. I was greatly excited and carried around the map (which contained more 'secret' detail than anything I knew existed with the GOI) and the accompanying literature to all and sundry in the PMO, MEA, MoWR, Ministry of Defence and Planning Commission. I got many cups of tea and a standard yawn!

A couple of years later, a Canadian engineer proposed a clever alternative to damming the U-Bend. This was to divert the river by means of a reinforced rubberised-plastic, sausage-shaped balloon which could be carried to the site, inflated and then anchored across the gorge at certain times of the year and then deflated, rolled up and stored until the next round.

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The world was interested in India's water wealth, but not India. Such appallingly slothful, play-safe, conventional thinking has held India back while the world strides along. The country has lately been in a tizzy because of a reported Chinese plan to tap U-Bend energy to divert the waters of the Tsang-po arm of the Brahmaputra (and separately, the Salween and Mekong), north to the Gobi desert and the Beijing plains. Yet, the plan has been both advocated and roundly criticised in China.* There is a danger in crying wolf over red herrings.

Some local use and diversion is possible but well within China's legitimate entitlement to the waters concerned as most of the discharge in the case of the Tsang-po/Brahmaputra originates outside Tibet, south of the Himalaya. The smart thing would be for India to propose a consortium of India and eastern-SAARC, China, Japan, ASEAN, the ADB, World Bank and ESCAP to study the possibility of harnessing the potential of the U-Bend on a sustainable basis as a means of developing a trans-regional energy grid.

*

One of the regrettable aspects of water resource development in India has been the neglect of inland navigation as a vital part of an inter-nodal transport network, including the seasonal use of motorised country craft in shallow waters and canals, and its integration with coastal and estuarine transport. A most interesting plan to stimulate dispersed industrial growth in the Bombay hinterland, by reviving navigation through a network of interconnected creeks, in the 1980s, fell through for lack of imagination.

The first blow was typically struck by building a low Thana Creek bridge under which a dhow could not pass even with furled and lowered masts at low tide. An efficient, ecologically sound, low-cost transport network that could have helped decongest and redevelop Bombay, make for better living and provide stimulus to the neglected and relatively backward near-mainland was thoughtlessly foreclosed. The rising land mafia probably played a part in the process.

The same must be said about the manner in which a dying river port at Calcutta, on which the sun had long set, has been allowed to remain an albatross around the neck of this great metropolitan hub of eastern India. A continuing eastward shift in the Lower Ganges over the past 150 years has created a series of silt dams that have progressively blocked the offtakes of its deltaic distributaries, starting with the Bhagirathi-Hooghly, which flows past Calcutta.

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*See 'Tibet Water Plan to Save China' by Li Ling, Beijing, 2005.

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The Farakka Barrage was constructed to force 40,000 cusecs of headwater flows into the Bhagirathi-Hoogly feeder to flush the river and prevent the ingress of salinity. This has enabled Calcutta to remain a low-grade inland dock that can service medium-sized lightened vessels at high tide, with Haldia, lower down the estuary, acting as the major sister dock. Even Haldia is not too well sited and cannot accommodate very large carriers and tankers.

Calcutta Port, with twin dock systems at Calcutta and Haldia, however, controls the entire waterway from Farakka to the ocean at Sandheads. It has also set down operational terms and labour standards that have held Haldia back and protected the less efficient labour norms of the Calcutta dockyard.

The lightening and topping up of vessels at Haldia, Paradip or Vishakapatnam entails avoidable turn-round time and costs that have hampered shipping and the industrial economy of eastern India, Nepal and Bhutan and thereby retarded development, employment and income generation in this poverty belt. It has also choked Calcutta city, which has to handle both in-coming and out-going traffic unrelated to its own needs, thus hampering its civic and urban rehabilitation. And all this to maintain a dying port at an extravagant flushing cost of 40,000 cusecs of headwater, which is roughly equivalent to emptying, say, one Bhakra reservoir into the sea annually.

The answer would be to relocate the Calcutta 'ocean' port at or near Sagar Island, along with a deep-water buoy-mooring in the ocean that could receive very large carriers/tankers, pipe liquid cargo onshore, and redistribute containerised cargo in barges that could ply up-river to Haldia and all the way to Farakka, serving a number of river ports on either bank of the river. This would decongest central Calcutta and trigger dispersed industrialisation and urbanisation along the extended waterfront; revive employment and industrial growth in the Greater Calcutta region (on a scale far larger than at present); and re-energise eastern India. Such a proposal merits examination even today

The Bhagirathi-Hooghly could be satisfactorily flushed and the inland waterway maintained with 10,000-15,000 cusecs of headwater below Farakka during the lean season, and more as the river rises. This would leave another 20,000-25,000 cusecs of lean season headwater flows available for two purposes. Some part could be diverted for municipal and irrigation uses in Lower Bengal and the greater Calcutta metropolitan region and, the balance sent down the Ganga to augment supplies to Bangladesh, in keeping with the commitment made under the Ganges Treaty.

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The trade-off for the latter could be an agreement with Bangladesh to permit multiple water, power, road-rail, pipeline and transit facilities between West Bengal and the North-east. If a barrage on the Brahmaputra at Jogighopa near Dhubri were constructed, monsoon flows stored in Arunachal/Meghalaya could be variously diverted into the Teesta and Mahananda or allowed to flow down the Brahamaputra/Jamuna into Bangladesh and then diverted through short links within that country into the Ganges/Padma for augmentation. In this last event, Farakka diversions to Bangladesh could instead be moved to Orissa and further south. A whole new dimension could be given to regional cooperation and planning.

A consideration of water issues cannot be concluded without reference to the Indus, the common source of sustenance for India's arid north-west and Pakistan. The Indus Treaty has served well despite three wars and grouches on both sides. It divides the flows of the Indus system in the proportion of 80 per cent to Pakistan (from the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab, or the three western rivers) and 20 per cent to India (from the three eastern rivers, namely, the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi). The IWT provides for operational supervision, consultation, and field inspection by an Indus Commission, headed by senior commissioners on either side, and an elaborate dispute resolution mechanism through a neutral expert or a court of arbitration in case of 'differences' or 'disputes'.

Pakistan enjoys the right to consultation, inspection and approval of all Indian designs and plans, for the modest uses permitted to it in J&K from the three western rivers. Persistent objections by Pakistan have, however, virtually killed the Tulbul flood retention barrage on the Jhelum and numerous other schemes such as the Sallal, Dul Hasti and Baglihar projects. Most future projects and even mini and micro-hydro schemes have been challenged despite the fact that the area that may be brought under irrigation in J&K is still below the prescribed limit, while what has been built of the permissible hydel/flood storage is negligible.

Rather than use the established IWT mechanism to resolve issues, Pakistan has recently begun increasingly to resort to political grandstanding. It has revived the argument that Jammu and Kashmir, which controls the Indus headwaters, is its lifeline and that India's sinister designs will enable it to dry up the Chenab, in particular, or send down floods at will, causing great harm and rendering it strategically vulnerable in either event. The arguments are spurious but have been taken up by ideologues and jihadis, who have staged hysterical demonstrations calling on India to cease 'water terrorism' and 'water theft' or face war.

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With climate change leading to glacial melt, unpredictable weather, and the more frequent formation of debris dams that impound water and then burst causing havoc downstream, trans-Himalayan/Karakoram hydrology is fast changing. A study by a World Bank consultant suggests that the Indus may carry a higher summer discharge at Skardu for the next two or three decades, after which mean flows will drop by up to 30 per cent. Storages will, therefore, be important as the Indus headwaters are in rain shadow areas that could yet experience aberrant rain currents. Pakistan is short of storage sites and bogged in controversy over the projected Kalabagh and Skardu Dams, but the fact is that the headwaters of the Upper Indus allocated to it lie in Indian territory. On the other hand, India cannot optimise the development of the western rivers flowing through it, including the limited share allocated for its use in J&K, without seeking Pakistani approval. Consequently, the full potential of the Indus system cannot be optimally realised without cooperation between the two countries, which the treaty envisages (Article VII) and was, indeed, the first option proposed by the World Bank after Partition.

I have, for quite some years, argued the case for negotiating an agreement to do just that through an Indus-II grafted seamlessly on the existing Indus-I as provided. Based on Article VII, 'Future Cooperation', both sides could agree jointly to survey, investigate, build and manage future projects within the three western river basins lying on either side of the Line of Control.

The penny took quite a while to drop but thoughtful persons on both sides are, hopefully, warming to the idea. The Indian prime minister, Dr Manmohan Singh did, in fact, vaguely incorporate this while interpreting his making-boundaries-irrelevant formula for a J&K settlement with Islamabad in 2006. This formulation, broadly endorsed by President Musharraf, envisaged the Line of Control as a soft or porous boundary between two largely autonomous J&K entities increasingly bonded by travel, trade, investment and cultural exchange, with an evolving joint oversight mechanism not derogating from the existing twin sovereignties of India and Pakistan.

There are certain structural problems India must address in managing its water resources. Regional cooperation is an obvious priority and must extend to Tibet and Myanmar.

With Myanmar, two on-going projects hold out promise. The first is Indian assistance to developing the 3000 MW Chindwin cascade, starting with the 1200 MW Tamanthi Dam, east of Phek in Nagaland. The other is the development of a multi-modal (road-water) corridor from southern

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Mizoram to Sitwe port (formerly Akyab) on the Arakan coast, down the partly navigable lower Kaladan River.

It is also necessary to adopt basins and sub-basins as natural units of planning. In the eastern region, broad principles of cooperation have been laid down between India and Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan through specific project agreements, which can form the basis for wider cooperation, in course of time.

At home, basin planning has been extolled but remains unimplemented. The Damodar Valley Corporation was an early essay in basin development on the TVA model. But West Bengal unfortunately backed out within a few years. A Sone Basin Commission was proposed but never took off. The Narmada Development Authority is more an umpire and overseer than a true basin authority. This reform must come.

The other problem is that political and administrative boundaries do not coincide with river basin configurations. The solution would appear to lie in promoting water parliaments, so that upper and lower riparians can come together to discuss matters of common interest, and evolve their own dispute-avoidance and resolution mechanisms. Acceptance of water markets would also help as this will introduce market realities and price-cost mechanisms to determine cost-effective solutions instead of dependence on political bargaining that does not always work as the Cauvery and Sutlej-Beas disputes testify. France has instituted water parliaments. Nearer home, Rajendra Singh has revived dead rivers in eastern Rajasthan by building earthen dams and establishing local water parliaments to govern the resultant water flow.

*

With my immediate water agenda largely accomplished at the CPR, I turned to another major area of interest, the North-east. This again entailed much travel and consultation throughout the region.*

The bottling up of the North-east, east of the Siliguri neck, is an obvious geo-political handicap. Strangely this was never seriously addressed for decades. And it is only more recently that thoughts have turned to a Look East policy that essentially seeks to make the North-

*The outcome was *India's North-east Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996, 1998, 2004), a holistic two-way introduction of the North-east to the Indian heartland and vice versa, within a larger regional setting.

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east a land bridge to its northern and eastern neighbourhood, but as a partner and not merely as 'a corridor and a bus-stop' as feared by some.

The intention is probably there, as envisioned by the (Moreh)-Tamu-Kalewa road link built by India in Myanmar,* or the proposed Kaladan corridor. But implementation has faltered grievously. For lack of the most elementary trade facilitation measures, Moreh, in Manipur, on the Burma Road, has lost its importance to Tamu, a hundred metres away in Myanmar, and has been reduced to a den of licensed smugglers. No effort has been made to harness the talents and widely established networks built by Chettiar traders, over a century and more across South-east Asia. The Chinese, in contrast, use their diaspora constructively.

The story of the Guwahati international airport and air-cargo terminal is equally dismal with a cycle of large investment, expectations, inaction, disillusionment. All this on account of a singular lack of concurrent, inter-departmental/sectoral thinking and matching action. The dithering over inter-country rather than mere 'customary border trade' across the Nathu La pass between India and China betrays a discontinuity between thought and action, in this regard. We 'look east' but fear to 'act east'. Perhaps, a good way to begin would be to take small sub-regions and build cross-border growth poles or growth triangles with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and China with requisite trade facilitation, infrastructure and connectivity that could make these bridgeheads for wider cooperation in due course.

Insurgency, extortion and a sense of insecurity is pleaded in extenuation of inaction. This is only partly true. Peace and development go hand in hand. Political accommodation and economic opportunity can present an alternative vision to the gun which has today largely been reduced to a symbol of (criminal) adventurism, parochialism and hopelessness for many.

The 'North-east' is a handy geographical expression for a very diverse geo-political region. Each of its eight member states and the cultural units within them have unique identities, which cannot be obliterated or ignored. Yet, geo-political compulsions dictate togetherness for certain common purposes. The North-east as a geographical and geo-political entity includes North Bengal (and the Darjeeling-Gurkha Hills autonomous region within it) and the entire area lying beyond the strategic Siliguri neck. All critical lifeline services—the national highway,

*The road is essentially a Burma-India link road although built entirely in Myanmar.

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railway, Brahmaputra waterway, oil pipeline, power transmission lines, microwave circuit and optic fibre cables—pass through it. For planning purposes, North Bengal/DGHA should therefore be treated as part of the North-east and granted 'Observer' status or 'Associate' membership of the North Eastern Council. West Bengal may fear this as a first step towards the detachment of 'Kamtapur' (inhabited by the Rajbongshi community) and further demands by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hills Council. But this could actually assuage local sentiments.

At the same time, the North-east must know itself and be socially integrated. It must become an economic unit or common market, so as to be able to develop economies of scale for given purposes, and for security and intelligence coordination and border management. Establishing an active North-east parliamentary forum in Delhi would be useful.

In 2008, the Department for Development of the North-east Region (DoNER) commissioned 'North-east Vision—2022', a study by the National Institute for Public Finance and Policy, Delhi. This was aided by a somewhat ornamental steering committee of which I was appointed chairman. I argued that the NE Vision must be people-centred and participatory even as it promotes state, regional, national and international linkages. The fulfilment of basic needs (drinking water, primary health, universal primary education, shelter, mid-day meals in schools, rural connectivity, and public distribution system coverage for below-the-poverty-line families) must be speedily completed and upgraded to given standards, and expanded to include total immunisation and HIV-AIDS control, sanitation and solid waste management, electricity/bio-fuel for every household, further devolution to local bodies, an employment guarantee and micro-credit for self-help groups. This might require the clustering of hamlets for the provision of viable services on a cost-effective basis and minimum standards. Some of this is already happening.

Land is communally owned in the tribal North-east, but is being alienated through benami transactions, concealed leases and marriages of convenience to illegal immigrants and others. This needs to be surveyed and regulated as it could trigger future conflict. The annual occupation and cultivation of fertile *char* lands (exposed post-flood river-beds) in Assam also needs to be looked into and suitable policy guidelines formulated. Further, each North-east state should be encouraged to lay down a policy for the allocation of tribal lands for infrastructure, utilities, industry and agro-processing centres through public-private partnership and other forms of cooperation to ensure

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local value addition. Meghalaya at one stage articulated a concept of 'tribal interest'. Land should be acquired by the state on lease and tribal communities/owners made stakeholders and co-sharers in the future stream of benefits.

While Assam is not *the* North-east, it is its base and anchor with a population more than double the size of all the other units put together. Its buoyancy and growth is, therefore, vital to the health of the entire region. Floods take a huge toll annually, and are responsible for low risk, single crop agriculture. Arunachal and Assam in particular need to come to an understanding on optimising water resource development, which is currently geared to hydro generation at the cost of flood storage and water conservation, considering that the Brahmaputra carries almost a third of India's total run-off, which represents a national/ regional surplus.

I therefore reiterated my plea that if Arunachal were to augment year-round power through storages, conversion of this energy into income and employment should be facilitated by investment in manufacturing and infrastructure in special economic zones. These should be established within designated 'trusteeship areas' in the disputed Assam-Arunachal border flatlands extending over 740 square kilometres along the foothills (and similar disputed border tracts between Assam and Meghalaya and Mizoram).

In addition to mega hydro projects, micro-hydel, biomass, wind and water turbines should be widely exploited in the entire region as stand-alone systems for providing energy for remote areas and hamlets. Similarly, hydrams could be used to lift water from river valleys for use and storage at higher altitudes, for municipal and irrigation uses.

The North-east could be, more or less, self-sufficient in rice within ten to twelve years, given flood mitigation through multipurpose dams and detention reservoirs in the hills. These could reduce flood peaks and make possible double cropping and enhanced productivity with earlier rabi sowing, winter irrigation, the revival of cooperative credit structures, integrated pest control and integrated paddy-fish/duck farming. Self-sufficiency in fish and poultry products should be possible in five to seven years through self-help groups, supported by micro-credit, and increased availability of feed through more intensive agriculture. The de-silting of beels and ox-bows through NREGA and their linkage, where possible, would give a fillip to pisciculture and navigation by country craft operating feeder routes to National Waterway No. II along the Brahmaputra/Barak and their tributaries.

The area under jhum should be steadily reduced, possibly halved by

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2012, and virtually eliminated by 2017. Meanwhile, jhum agriculture should be upgraded along the lines of the Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development (NEPED) programme and all abandoned jhum fields reclaimed to forest or plantations within that same period through joint ventures. For the rest, the hill areas might develop high-value organic farming, horticulture and floriculture through public-private partnerships, with NDDB-type cooperatives or corporates 'mentoring' smallholders and taking care of extension services, supply of seed material, improved farm technology and post-harvest management, processing, branding and marketing on a profit sharing basis, exploiting economies of scale. Arunachal and Sikkim, like Himachal, could use their altitudinal advantage to grow disease-free seed and niche products for the region and eastern India, and for export to Bangladesh and beyond.

I advocated negotiating with the Army/Security Forces for local provisioning of at least 50 per cent of their fresh, bottled and canned food requirements within the next five years. This 'captive' market could be linked to reputed manufacturers/suppliers with backward linkages to farmers. A small price preference could be considered for some years. The same captive market could be exploited for the supply of certain clothing, equipment and medical stores to the Security Forces through local manufacture.

I remember flying extensively in the then NEFA (Arunachal) in 1955, in no-frills regional air taxi services operated by private carriers, which provided intra-regional connectivity using Dakotas, Caribous and disused wartime landing strips, even as they doubled up for air supply maintenance of far-flung and inaccessible military posts and civil stations, several days or weeks march from the nearest roadhead. Dakotas were gradually phased out and the IAF took over air maintenance. Why should not private carriers be encouraged to resume the job of air maintenance in the North-east, using small fixed wing aircraft (as in Nepal) and small landing strips, as a supplement to running regional air services with Guwahati as the hub? These would feed Guwahati international airport and sustain charter flights by opening up tourism in the region.

The principal natural wealth of the North-east lies in its bio-diversity, straddling as it does three great bio-geographic zones, and its vast hydro potential. Objection has been taken to large multi-purpose dams that could store water, cushion floods and generate clean energy, on grounds of environmental losses and displacement. Instead, run-of-river hydel projects have been preferred and are proliferating,

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pre-empting future storage possibilities in some cases. The Supreme Court also handed down a sweeping one-line judgment on the (terminal) Lower Subansiri Dam in Arunachal in 2003, in a forest case. This postulated no upstream storages and a resettlement package that greatly magnified the problem. The judgment has fortunately undergone review.

Displacement in the sparsely populated North-east can be quite small. Yet it is culturally and socially sensitive as many tiny tribes are involved, and the losses, proportionate to their total numbers and homelands, can be very considerable. Hence the need for a caring attitude. Yet it is possible to persuade those displaced to move to agreed resettlement areas with a package of compensation that assists the entire community to improve its lot and take advantage of new opportunities. 'Oustees' are gradually becoming shareholders in these projects through an annuity for community development and training for new livelihoods. The 'trusteeship zones' earlier described could offer promising resettlement opportunities as well.

Not all (large) dams are bad. But some may be unnecessary or could have outlived their utility. An example of the latter category would be the Gumti Dam in Tripura with its reduced 7-9 MW output on account of siltation. Tripura now has significant gas reserves to generate power and were the Gumti Dam decommissioned and its 46,000-hectare reservoir bed vacated, the 45,000 tribal families displaced by the dam could be resettled, in a major act of reconciliation and peace. This could be a significant initiative to turn around insurgency in the North-east, signal a caring administration and contribute towards bridging the tribal-Bengali divide that was exacerbated by the dam.

More rapid development that helps the North-east to catch up with the rest of the country will call for the import of labour and, initially, skilled workers and managers to build and operate these projects. The fear, however, is that such an influx of personnel could lead to demographic change and 'outsider' domination. These anxieties can be laid to rest by providing for a large non-territorial constituency in each state, in which all eligible non-resident voters could be enrolled, limiting their electoral clout to just one seat.

The notion that the North-east is totally riven by insurgency and violence is exaggerated. Large areas are relatively peaceful. Insurgency is winding down in Tripura and Meghalaya. Nagaland and Manipur are troubled with inter-tribal rivalry as much as by separatism, though a ceasefire is holding while peace talks proceed. Assam still confronts the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which is now divided and has lost public support on account of its mindless terror tactics.

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The Naga uprising is, of course, the oldest and most stubborn conflict. Its present phase is manifest in Manipur, and to some extent in the Tirap division of Arunachal and in Karbi Anglong in Assam. Nevertheless, the periodic extension of the Nagaland ceasefire has been a hopeful sign. As germane is the continuing inability of various Naga factions to achieve internal reconciliation. The IM and Khaplang factions remain at daggers drawn, to the distress of church leaders and other segments of the community.

Negotiations with the IM group have, over the years, led to the recognition by the Indian government of the Naga peoples' 'unique history' as a basis for further discussion. Sovereignty is not now being strongly canvassed, and talks have moved towards exploring whether these 'unique' features can find constitutional expression through a careful analysis and possible amendment of the Indian Constitution, providing for larger devolution and a possible incorporation of other features in a Naga constitution that has an organic link with the Indian Constitution. The J&K constitution is not the only precedent. A remodelled Sixth Schedule devised to accommodate Naga aspirations or the wider Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996, point to other variants that can also serve such a purpose, if mutually agreed, without derogating from national unity and integrity.

The issue of Nagalim, or unification of all Naga inhabited areas, need not constitute an insuperable obstacle if non-territorial solutions are sought. These are eminently practicable and have worked elsewhere. Assam has provided for Apex Councils on a non-territorial basis for the cultural and economic advancement of small, scattered plains tribals such as the Tiwas, Rabhas, Mishings, Sonowals and Deoris. These models can be developed and adapted to provide innovative solutions.

The prime minister has said that the government is prepared to go the extra mile, and the peace and development thrust of the new North-east policy holds out much promise. It would be unwise to assume that development can be a panacea for all ills. At the same time there is no doubt that the people of the North-east have been long isolated and handicapped by lack of connectivity and infrastructure, to match the modernising aspirations of simple communities traumatised by Partition and sudden integration. They have had to manage multiple transitions as they move from a subsistence-barter economy to a monetised, market system with global links. The opportunities likely to be thrown up in increasing measure will change mindsets, if the process enables people to assume ownership of their own destiny.

Naga youths, like others in the region and the country as a whole, are

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increasingly anxious to acquire knowledge and skills that equip them to venture beyond government service and avail themselves of tantalising professional, technical and other market opportunities. Young North-east scholars in Delhi and elsewhere are discovering India. Many are thus gradually and unconsciously beginning to redefine the meaning and purpose of self-determination.

Much depends on how diversity and multiple transitions in the North-east are managed. Despite tales of gloom and doom, the process of democratic nation-building evident in the region over the past six decades has seen some amazing successes. The bringing together of over 110 tribes to forge a larger Arunachali identity within the Indian fold through peaceful, democratic means, has few parallels anywhere. Hindi is perhaps more widely spoken in Arunachal than in Kerala or Tamil Nadu. The manner in which a progression of safeguards and increasingly sophisticated autonomy models have been established in the region as stepping-stones towards acceptance of a common Indian nationhood is another tremendous and largely unsung achievement. Much remains to be done; yet there is no reason for diffidence, let alone despair.

I continue to watch developments in the North-east with interest. It was humbling and gratifying to be recognised as a 'Friend of the North-east' by *The Shillong Times* in 2006 and be presented, two years later, with the Assam Government's Srimanta Sankaradeva Award.

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As a development journalist, I had, from the commencement of my assignment in Delhi in 1951, been aware of the activities of the Ford Foundation while reporting for *The Times of India*. The foundation occupied an enviable position and a very large presence, on account of its intimate association with grassroots community development, the creation of a national extension service, agriculture, population control and human development, which constituted the core of the First Five-Year Plan. The Planning Commission was then the country's primary think-tank and brains trust. Nehru, its chairman, V.T. Krishnamachari, the deputy chairman, C.D. Deshmukh, the finance minister, and others were on first name terms with Ford's lively and indefatigable country director, Douglas Ensminger, who ran a larger establishment and, in some ways, commanded more influence than the American embassy which found it prudent to route the many requests for assistance and consultancy it received to the more flexible foundation.

Between 1952 (when it extended its operations beyond American

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shores to India) and 2002 (when it celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its going international), it had invested over $350 million in India. This certainly was big money but more than that was the catalysing role of innumerable small grants in support of institution building, as also a rich stream of experts and consultants in various fields. It enabled and encouraged the government to experiment and innovate and was, for twenty years, an implementing agency as well, employing a large national and international staff.

Nehru had invited Ford to India. The foundation was quick to seize the opportunity, in keeping with its expanded post-war charter to spread peace and democracy worldwide by eliminating poverty and injustice through international cooperation. India fitted the bill. Paul Hoffman, who had earned great repute as the US Marshall Plan administrator in Europe after the Second World War, was commissioned by Ford to discuss with the Indian leadership how best it might help. According to Ensminger, Hoffman was later to write that 'the peace of the world might for generations to come be determined by what happened in India'. Chester Bowles too thought India was the 'key to Asia' after 'the debacle in China', which is why he asked Truman to post him as his ambassador to India.

Ford's role in India was seminal and, having reported on its interventions over many years, I was delighted to be invited to be one of a team to write up its half-century Indian saga. I was asked to look at the part it played in fostering human resource development, capacity building, and social science research in India, of which the Centre for Policy Research was an offspring. The assignment gave me the opportunity to revisit parts of my own career, and to get better acquainted with the genesis and background to certain programmes and projects by delving into the original proposals and related correspondence, carefully maintained in the Ford Foundation's archives in New York.

The foundation's early influence in India was quite phenomenal, and it was instrumental in spearheading several studies and programmes in diverse areas. Well aware that agriculture was the key, and that success lay in agrarian reform, Ford brought in Wolf Ladejinsky, who had carried out land reform in Japan under General MacArthur. Ladejinsky described land reforms in J&K as the best in India, but was disappointed by the lack of political will to implement a meaningful national programme of agrarian reform. On another plane, many American intellectuals thought democratic development would enable newly-decolonised nations to withstand the spread of Communism. The Indian example was seen as critical and hence worth close study, especially as

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India-China comparisons would inevitably be made.*

Independence had meant a departure from the largely law and order and revenue role of the administration to the implementation of a totally new development philosophy for which India lacked trained cadres. The government needed applied (not theoretical) economists and social scientists who could map and measure behavioural change, and those trained in these disciplines were lacking in the country. The creation of multipurpose village level workers (VLWs) in national service blocks of roughly 100 villages, reporting to a Block Development Officer, created a new development jurisdiction and cadre to initiate a programme of rural transformation. Ford not only promoted these new programmes but also assisted in establishing the capacity to train the requisite cadres. Arnold Toynbee was to comment that 'the practical idealism of this great Indian enterprise may bring about one of the most beneficent revolutions in the peasantry's life that have been known so far in history'.

A Foundation grant helped establish the National Council for Applied Economic Research and Applied Economics departments were founded or strengthened at the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta and Delhi, Bombay University, the Gokhale Institute, Poona, and the Institute for Economic Growth, Delhi. Ford assistance was also available for assisting the Planning Commission with mathematical modelling in the context of the Third Plan. International economists under Professor Rodenstein-Rodan worked with the Planning Commission, while Indian economists like Pitamber Pant, T.N. Srinivasan, Sukhomoy Chakravarty, Amartya Sen, K.S. Krishnaswamy and Kirit Parikh worked at different times in Delhi and the MIT (where superior computer facilities were available) to do large-scale input-output modelling.

Ford's engagement spread to the training of steelworkers in private US units to man the new Rourkela, Bhilai and Durgapur steel plants, to assisting in running management seminars (for public sector managers) and the establishment of the IIMs and IITs, the Indian Institute of Public Administration, the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, the National Institute of Design and the Small Industries Extension Institute in Hyderabad.

The absence of strong social science research institutions and

*This thesis was developed by Max Millikan and Walt Rostow at the MIT and amplified by Simon Kuznets, who strongly advocated a case study of India as a basis for projecting a case for 'competitive co-existence'. Wilfred Malenbaum, head of MIT's India Project, directed the study.

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networking among them led to the conceptualisation and establishment of the Indian Council for Social Science Research which spawned a whole family of women's study centres, policy research institutes (like the CPR and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, the China Study Centre and the Delhi Policy Group), and the Foreign Service Training Institute.

India's expanding foreign economic relations and accompanying trade negotiations led to funding for the Indian Council for Research in International Economic Relations (ICRIER) and the South Asian Network of Economic Research Institutes (SANEI) and South Asia Centres for Economic Policy (SACEPs). Programme funding from Ford was also instrumental in mounting many regional cooperation dialogues in South Asia primarily around water resources, conflict resolution, regional security and inter-country dialogues and in promoting campus diversity. WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) was another pioneering venture that Ford helped to fly.*

India owes much thanks to the Ford Foundation and other foundations which have set an example in disinterested philanthropy that we would do well to emulate. Charity has been a long tradition in the country but this has been geared more towards individual salvation, propitiating the gods, or for the greater glory of the donor's family, and not so much as service to one's fellow beings (Tatas being a notable exception). Of late, disaster relief has evoked sympathy and support, but it is only now that a corporate culture of philanthropy is developing under a new rubric of corporate social responsibility.

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Alongside my writing activities, I was closely engaged with Prasar Bharati (PB), on whose board I served from its inception in December 1997, until the end of 2003. I was a part- time member along with Nikhil Chakravartty (chairman) and Romila Thapar, Abid Hussain, U.R. Rao, the space scientist, and Rajendra Yadav, the writer. S.S. Gill, the former information and broadcasting secretary was appointed CEO. Unfortunately Nikhil Chakravartty, a distinguished journalist and highly respected figure, was already around 85 and ailing and was soon thereafter immobilised by ill health from which he sadly never recovered.

We had a strong board but with the chairman's tragic passing, PB was

*Please see my book, *Project India: Human Resource Development and Capacity Building, The Ford Foundation in India, 1952-2002* (New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, November 2006).

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bereft of a formal head for the next three years. Nor was there a personnel or finance director and, with S.S. Gill's departure following an amendment that rendered him over age, no independent, full-time chief executive officer.

There was no full-time director general of Doordarshan for a while and with the director general of AIR, O.P. Kejriwal, officiating as the chief executive officer, no full-time person in his substantive post. With one board member being appointed governor of Mizoram, and a third of the six part-time directors retiring every two years, we next lost Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav. Prasar Bharati's board, I quipped, had been reduced to a mere signboard with no personnel or financial powers and only notional autonomy with an additional secretary from the information and broadcasting ministry becoming CEO. The NDA government did not appear too greatly concerned, and one of its I&B ministers, Pramod Mahajan, was frank enough to say that Prasar Bharati was and must remain a government organ. But that was later.

Gill was a dynamic CEO and was convinced that PB should immediately register a difference in its news and entertainment channels. The latter meant serials, the making of which was outsourced. My priorities were different and I wrote a series of briefing papers for discussion starting with setting out a 'philosophy for (public service) broadcasting'. We had many 'publics' to serve.

I insisted that PB was autonomous and not an agency of the government but accountable to Parliament, which voted its budget, with the information and broadcasting ministry only acting as an intermediary and no more. Further, 'autonomy' was both external (the legal framework) and internal (the working culture). There must be functional autonomy all the way, from the national, down to the regional and local level, and for the professional and programme staff whose creativity should be encouraged. Autonomy was never given; it needed to be grasped. This, the board failed to do. Radio and television must enjoy equal priority—which was sadly not to be. External broadcasting had to be encouraged as the Voice of India, with the monitoring service being used as a valuable news input for domestic broadcasts on regional and international affairs. Instead, the monitoring service was taken over by the home ministry while the External Service was allowed to run to seed.

I made a strong pitch for developing low-budget community broadcasting by franchising AIR and DD transmitters and programme production centres to approved institutions on the basis of renewable licences within a liberal policy framework. Instructional and extension

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broadcasting offered vast opportunities for distance learning, refresher training, imparting new knowledge to, say, rural and small town doctors (whom the Indian Medical Association was trying to reach). All this required training and this had to be another major priority.

Since a reduction of financial dependence on the exchequer is a necessary adjunct to autonomy, I advocated meeting the finance minister to persuade him to re-introduce broadcast receiver licences (other than for black and white TV sets and single-band radio transistors), on the basis of a single one-time levy, at the time and point of purchase. On one estimate, this could bring in something like Rs 800-900 crores annually. Further, programme ministries at the Centre and in the states should be prepared to fund AIR and DD for extension programmes relating to their departments, but in all cases, as in external broadcasting, with editorial control vesting in PB. To reinforce such bonding, I suggested the establishment of strong liaison groups between PB, the departments of the government concerned and subject matter specialists, to offer guidance and to monitor and evaluate outcomes. Programme Advisory Committees too should be revivified at all levels.

Other proposals related to starting a regular national and regional feature on 'Achieving India'. In this, positive developments, of which there are many, might be suitably portrayed. The cultural side too offered vast possibilities, such as language learning, concerts and festivals at heritage sites, tribal music and dance competitions, and so forth. One curious discovery I made was that AIR had long had a ban on twenty-seven musical instruments (such as the piano) 'not consistent with the genius of Indian music'. This prohibition had been eased but there was still an antiquated system of grading musicians that put a premium on older talent. This merited review.

The AIR-DD network constitutes one of the largest broadcast transmission systems in the world. Yet haphazard planning, overlapping footprints and under-utilisation had resulted in losses which needed to be made good through a more efficient use of the network. To this end, I pushed the idea of hiving off PB's transmission system into a subsidiary corporation to operate a national information highway and antenna-tower facility on which others might also piggyback. This would enable AIR and DD to concentrate on programming while the Transmission Corporation might operate commercially.

This matter was, in fact, entrusted to an expert group under Professor P.V.Indiresan, a reputed electronics scientist and a colleague at the CPR, which endorsed the idea in a report entitled, 'The Transmission Infrastructure of Prasar Bharati', in December 2000. The French TDF

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(transmission and R&D) corporation, a by-product of similar disaggregation of the earlier French broadcasting system, ORTF, lent its expertise to the task force and was willing to come in as a collaborator. Unfortunately, the proposal to unbundle PB was never pursued.

The ideas fell on stony ground. Nobody was listening. With concentration on Delhi, the regions were neglected. Whenever I travelled, I would visit the local AIR or DD kendra and interact with the staff. This was greatly appreciated. None seemed to know what Delhi was thinking. My advice to station directors was that they should strike out and innovate on their own without waiting for approval from headquarters. If Delhi objected they would hear about it. I used to send a note on my visits, to the chairman and CEO.

Typically, after a visit to the Lucknow kendras, I made these observations: Both AIR and DD lacked correspondents and there was considerable tension between newly appointed Indian Information Service cadres and older non-IIS personnel who resented being bossed over by less experienced hands. There was no machinery by way of staff councils, to redress grievances. The well-endowed Lucknow DD Staff Training Institute was grossly under-utilised while DD was crying out for trained personnel. Programme advisory councils were defunct and the audience research was weak.

In March 1999, AIR and DD programme staff employees threatened to go on strike, as they had been denied a raise given to certain intermediate engineering and programme staff, by virtue of a court ruling. Following the board's meeting with the agitating employees, the CEO and I met the minister, Pramod Mahajan, and said we had appealed to the staff to suspend the agitation and enter into negotiations. The minister offered us tea but little sympathy. As PB staff were government employees, he implied we were interlopers and had no role to play. Any decision taken would have a cascading effect across all administrative services.

Drawing a blank there, I then turned the minister's attention to the fact that PB was virtually functioning without any top management. The statutory selection committee was still awaiting official clarification on the terms it could offer the executive directors of personnel and finance. The minister replied that the Department of Personnel believed that PB was a regulatory body and, therefore, the appropriate rank for these officers was that of additional secretary. The information and broadcasting ministry's view, however, was that PB was not a regulatory body, and the finance and personnel directors should, therefore, enjoy the same status as the director general of AIR and DD, namely, something

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between an additional secretary and a full secretary. The pay differential was about Rs 1800. I described these subtleties as non-issues or, at best, an ego problem and said that if some marginal pay and benefits stood in the way, PB would be prepared to bridge the difference from within its own resources. Meanwhile, the selection must proceed. Nothing happened. Bumbledom reigned supreme.

The new information and broadcasting minister, Sushma Swaraj, tried to push matters, and said she had the approval of Vajpayee and Advani to propose my name as chairman. This was blocked by a member of the statutory selection committee on the ground that I had supported foreign direct investment in the print media, which I had, as barring this seemed like locking the stable door after the horse had bolted. Instead, the name of Dr M.S. Swaminathan, the distinguished agricultural scientist, had been proposed. I said that would be excellent, but his appointment was blocked elsewhere. Sushma Swaraj kept pressing my candidature but I was happy to step aside and suggested the name of Professor U.R. Rao, who was already on the board. It was accepted as an interim choice, and Professor Rao took over as chairman for the remaining period of his four-year term.

After Rao's term was over, the selection board chose M.V. Kamath, an old *Times of India* colleague, author and columnist for the *Organiser,* as chairperson. Kamath invited me to join in a courtesy call on the new information and broadcasting minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad. I was not reassured when he opened the conversation by asking the minister to tell us what he wanted of Prasar Bharati. I intervened to say that PB was an autonomous body, and that while we were not unmindful of the government's legitimate interests, we were by our charter bound to hew an independent path.

The PB Board in exercise of its powers had, in December 2001, selected a full-time director general of Doordarshan, S.Y. Quraishi, a Haryana cadre IAS officer, after short-listing many candidates. Quraishi quickly established his credentials for quiet competence and things began to look up. It was all the more astonishing, therefore, to read newspaper reports on 30 August 2003 stating that he had been removed. I immediately contacted the CEO, K.S. Sarma, and requested him to forward a letter to the chairman in Mumbai. It was an indignant and anguished communication that I sent Kamath:

> DG Doordarshan, an ex-officio member of our board, has been formally posted out of Prasar Bharati according to reports in today's newspapers. This is the culmination of an arbitrary

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speaking order of the Government some weeks ago in contravention of the Prasar Bharati Act. No reasons have been assigned and no reference was made to the Prasar Bharati Board, which selected him, or even to you, as Chairman, or the CEO.

An honourable and competent officer has been unfairly and unnecessarily hounded out on the whim of the Government, leaving behind a vacuum. The action gravely impairs the autonomy and credibility of Prasar Bharati.

At its last meeting, the board after much discussion resolved that you should write to the I&B Minister, expressing disquiet and dismay at this sudden development that has resulted in uncertainty and instability, and copy this to the Prime Minister under a separate covering letter. The purpose was to try and ensure that the autonomy of Prasar Bharati is respected in future and a sense of confidence and propriety is restored.

You have regrettably decided not to write such a letter which was to be sent as soon as formal orders were received—in order to 'avoid a confrontation' with the Government. This is deeply disappointing and leaves the board and its functioning open to internal and external ridicule and scorn. I find this unacceptable.

I would therefore like to seek an emergency meeting of the board to take stock of the situation as early as possible. Further, we need to seek clarification from the Attorney General regarding where we stand under the Act.

I would also urge that we consider immediately advertising the post of DG Doordarshan as the regulation about only looking for talent among Government deputationists has been aborted by the Government's own action. It cannot be argued that only a deputationist should be selected and when so selected can be removed on the Government's say-so on the ground that he is a deputationist. This has reduced the selection process to a farce. We can therefore now construe ourselves at liberty to adopt the alternative provided, namely, to open the field for candidates from the open market as well as such deputationists as come forward, if any.

Prasar Bharati is once again without a DG Doordarshan or a DG AIR. The post of Director (Personnel) remains vacant. It is neither fair nor satisfactory in the least that the CEO be required to shoulder all these additional responsibilities.

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> The individual aspect of the DG Doodarshan's removal may have receded, though it still leaves a gaping vacancy. The institutional damage remains to be addressed. We need to deliberate on all these issues as trustees of the public broadcasting service under the Prasar Bharati Act. The lead has to come from the board and we cannot abdicate our responsibility. To do so would be to let those who have perpetrated the instant mischief take cover behind our silence and pusillanimity.

The issue was ducked. The official members were constrained to toe the line. The other part-time members were namby-pamby and reluctant to pursue the matter. The minister blustered. All he said was that the PM and deputy PM had cleared the matter but could not offer any coherent reason for Quraishi's unceremonious ouster, or for the outrageously illegal procedure followed. Maybe, general elections were at hand. My term at Prasar Bharati ended a few weeks later. Many had asked me earlier and subsequently why I had not resigned. My answer was that that was precisely what some others would have wished in order to pack the board with another time-server.

Unfortunately, with private television channels coming into their own, they began to set the pace and dictate public taste. Middle-class India, advertisers, the entertainment world, many within the print media, Parliament and government wanted Prasar Bharati to enter the lists by aping them. There was and still is little understanding of what public service broadcasting entails in a diverse, developing society such as India. With market reforms and accelerated economic growth, advertising spends went up exponentially, as did salaries. The 24-hour channels and, following them, the print media, began to package and market news and sell it as a product, like any standardised brand in a mall. The packaged product was designed to satisfy the consumer who purchased the goods and services advertised and on whose revenues the channel or paper depended. Hence the competition for ratings and circulation.

The problem is that almost half of India survives outside this market. And the whole purpose of a public service broadcaster in this context is to cater to the citizen and not just to the consumer. The citizen too represents not one but a bewildering multitude of people speaking different languages and dialects, existing at various levels of simplicity or sophistication, having different needs and aspirational trajectories, and possessed of different levels of comprehension and understanding, young and old, men, women and children, rural and urban, Dalit and

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tribal, living in mountain fastnesses, deserts and coastal swamps. So in downgrading even if not forgetting public service broadcasting, and with its timorous approach to community broadcasting and information empowerment, the essence was lost even as various side issues were debated.

The media has grown increasingly powerful in this information age. Scores of twenty-four-hour channels jostle to capture eyeballs (as the jargon goes). At the same time, newspaper circulation and titles are still rising with multiple facsimile editions of large chains saturating every district. The media has an important agenda-setting role. But much of what is doled out is trivia and sensation with some magisterial anchors and editors playing god. Trial by the media is commonplace and the right of reply is often only grudgingly acknowledged.

There is a great deal of editorialising in the news columns and headlines and many journalists have become activists or propagandists promoting a cause rather than portraying the news as it is, giving all sides and leaving it to the reader or viewer to form his or her own judgment. Editors are in decline and the lack of editorial control is a reason for some of the weaknesses described. Some leading papers have even abolished the post of editor, leaving page editors to be directed by the management, which is primarily concerned with the bottom line and patronage. Deals have been struck with business houses and political interests, the spoils being shared all along the line. There are exceptions, of course, and some of the best writing and coverage is superior to what there was earlier. But the average is sorely disappointing.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the noted Russian author, in *The First Circle*, likens a great writer to a teacher and a 'greater writer' to 'a second government', such is his reach and authority. Similarly, a good or great newspaper or channel is for its readers, listeners and viewers, part university, part government, both teacher and overseer. That perhaps was part of the meaning underlying the concept of the press as the Fourth Estate. We need to ask ourselves whether the Indian media has departed, or dare depart from that ideal, if it wants to remain true to its mission.

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A NEW INDIA EMERGES

The NDA government had not done badly at all during its tenure since 1999, and had put away its Hindutva agenda, to some extent, in the context of coalition politics. Economic progress was maintained and growth in 2003-04 had crossed 8 per cent. The pace of construction of the Golden Quadrilateral National Super-Highway was impressive. The telecom sector was bounding forward. Vajpayee had persisted in his peace initiatives over J&K, internally and with Pakistan. However, mounting cross-border terror attacks—in Srinagar and on the Red Fort and Parliament House in Delhi and the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC 814 to Kandahar—had vitiated Indo-Pakistan relations. The holding of fair and free elections in J&K, in 2002, against the background of intimidatory poll boycott calls had created a new air of confidence and hope in the state. The Look East policy was inching forward and boundary talks with China appeared, gradually, to be getting somewhere. Relations with the United States seemed headed towards a new warmth with understanding on closer ties through the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership.

The Gujarat pogrom, however, had wounded the BJP, and this had been compounded by its unwillingness to allow justice to work for reconciliation, arousing minority fears elsewhere. Indeed, Narendra Modi cashed in on the jingoism aroused by the Godhra-Gujarat killings to win another term in office. A rising tempo of 'cultural nationalism' fostered by those events saw the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute in Pune, a hallowed seat of scholarship, being vandalised early in 2004, by Shiv Sena sympathisers, because of allegedly derogatory references to Shivaji

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in a biography by an American author, James Laine, who had been assisted by the institute.

Yet, Vajpayee's stock was high, and the BJP wrested power from the Congress in three states, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Rajasthan, in October 2003. On balance, it appeared prudent to advance the general elections, which were held in four phases between 20 April and 4 May 2004, with the NDA pitted against the United Progressive Alliance. The BJP once again reiterated its Hindutva agenda, but not in loud tones, its principal slogan being 'India Shining'. More than that, the party targeted Sonia Gandhi and vowed, if re-elected, to introduce legislation to bar a 'foreigner' from contesting high office. The Congress, under Sonia Gandhi's leadership, campaigned for secular politics, inclusive governance and further economic reform.

There was a 7 per cent swing in favour of the Congress. As expected, others gravitated towards the winning side. The Left (with an enhanced strength of 59 seats) and others offered support from the outside on the basis of a common minimum programme, giving the ruling coalition a comfortable parliamentary margin. Sonia Gandhi won universal acclaim by renouncing office on the prompting of her 'inner voice', giving the Congress the moral high ground. Congress adherents milled around 10 Jan Path, Sonia Gandhi's residence, refusing to accept her decision. There were scenes of high emotion with hundreds offering dharna in tearful protest. Some prepared to fast unto death; others threatened self-immolation.

Sonia remained unmoved, backed by her children, Rahul and Priyanka. Many potential aspirants were disappointed when she finally announced that her prime ministerial candidate was Manmohan Singh, who had piloted economic reforms under Narasimha Rao and was now leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha. Manmohan Singh's modesty, high integrity, economic expertise and international connections stood him in good stead.

There was deep symbolism in the fact that India could boast a Sikh prime minister, sworn in by a greatly respected Muslim President, Abdul Kalam, heading a ruling coalition organisationally chaired by a Catholic Indian of Italian origin, with a Hindu leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani. Such amazing inclusiveness in governance had never before been witnessed anywhere, a fact soon to be reinforced by the appointment of a Scheduled Caste Chief Justice of India and a Parsee Chief of Air Staff.

Many wondered how the newly-ordained duality of power would work with Manmohan Singh, a soft-spoken technocrat, running the

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government and Sonia Gandhi, who had retained the office of UPA chairperson for herself, managing the party and ruling coalition. The critics' taunt, not long in coming, was that real power resided not at 7 Race Course Road, the prime minister's house, but at 10 Jan Path, Sonia Gandhi's residence, thus devaluing governance. This was misplaced. The duo evolved an instant equation, respecting one another and their respective roles and offices. Sonia Gandhi studiously deferred to the prime minister, always calling on him and giving him pride of place, while he was never shy of acknowledging her role. Nothing changed when Sonia Gandhi became chairperson of the National Advisory Council, composed of experts drawn from different fields, to translate the common minimum programme into plans of action. She demitted this honorary position later when some argued that it was nonetheless an office of profit that could result in her disqualification as an MP.

Another glass ceiling was broken when Pratibha Patil, a middle-ranking member of the Congress Party, was elected President of India and Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces, three years later when Dr Kalam demitted office. Kalam had been a People's President, greatly loved for his informality, unconventional ways and devotion to children (who enjoyed open house at Rashtrapati Bhavan). He was easily accessible through his responsive web site and set national goals such as 'igniting India' to become a developed nation by 2020, upgrading living conditions by programming urban amenities for rural areas and developing a bio-diversity park in the grounds of the President's estate.

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The Congress Party's 2004 manifesto gave centrality to the concerns of the common man or aam admi, the poor and disadvantaged. This was postulated on the premise of accelerated growth and social justice with the focus on gender, employment, livelihood, empowerment and universal primary education. A new deal was promised for the OBCs, a matter that was to generate much controversy. The two other pillars of the manifesto were the bridging of all divides and the creation of equal opportunities for all in a genuinely secular society; and the enhancement of both internal and external security by combating terror and Naxalite violence or left wing extremism, as it was more euphemistically described in official quarters.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which had been abused, was to be scrapped and replaced with more humane anti-terror legislation. The armed forces were to be modernised and urban renewal,

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social housing, administrative reforms, a revivified inter-state council, a new deal for the North-east, and affirmative action for minorities were on the agenda. The promise of 33 per cent representation for women in legislatures and the enactment of a Lok Pal Bill proved infructuous (and was only pressed again in 2010). In the field of foreign affairs the Congress said it stood for multi-polarity and opposed unilateralism, and that it would build solidarity through the G-20 to promote the interests of developing societies in the forthcoming WTO rounds of trade negotiations.

The record on growth was commendable. Steps were taken to rein in the fiscal deficit, rationalise tariffs, promote exports, encourage foreign direct investment and provide incentives for tax compliance by further simplifying procedures and lowering rates. Farm output kept fluctuating with the rains, despite touching a record 230 million tonnes, while the rate of growth of manufactured goods and services remained buoyant, augmenting their share in the GDP to 26 and 56 per cent, respectively, as against 18 per cent for agriculture. There was a stock market boom. The Bombay stock market's Sensitive Index, Sensex, climbed steadily, touching 18,000 points in October 2007, and then broke all records to cross 20,000 points. Foreign exchange reserves too witnessed a corresponding rise, registering $128 billion in February 2005 and going on to exceed $300 billion three years later.

The software boom drew tens of thousands of youth into this new rainbow industry. The country earned the sobriquet of being 'the world's back office' with Bangalore assuming the role of India's Silicon Valley, boasting global brand names like Infosys and Wipro (though a rogue element like Satyam was discovered later). There was a mushrooming of cyber cities in Hyderabad, Pune, Calcutta, Gurgaon, Chandigarh and elsewhere. The pharmaceutical, automotive and telecom sectors provided a cutting edge to new manufacturing growth. Reputed multinationals found it eminently sensible and desirable to tap into this growing market of talent (given the requisite skills at low cost), and set up state of the art R&D and design facilities in India. Mergers and acquisitions worldwide put Indian companies in the forefront of international industry in key sectors like steel, non-ferrous metals, pharma and automotives.

The telecommunications sector witnessed phenomenal growth with the number of rural mobile phone subscribers going up by almost 30 million to 93 million, in the twelve months ending December 2008. Rural connectivity was empowering and it transformed rural and small-town life. A burgeoning middle class had grown from 195 million in

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1995 to an estimated 275 million by 2008, creating a huge upwardly mobile market.

Tourism began to take off with the Incredible India campaign. Medical tourism appeared to offer considerable opportunities. Areas like diamond cutting and polishing opened up. Shortages of natural resources in both quantitative and qualitative terms led to large overseas investments in the oil and gas sector (in the Gulf, Africa, the Soviet Far East and off Myanmar's Arakan coast, alongside significant domestic finds in the offshore Krishna basin and in Rajasthan), as well as in coal mining and non-ferrous metals.

Growth rose to 9.2 per cent in 2005-06 and then touched 9.4 per cent the following year, while the GDP stood at $1.6 trillion. This marked out India as an emerging power with the fifth largest economy in the world after the US, China, Japan and Germany. It was poised to move to fourth or even third place within a few years, if these trends continued. India was soon part of the ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan and South Korea), an association set up to promote cooperation and financial stability in the Asia-Pacific region. It became India's largest trading partner, a first harvest of the country's Look East policy.

It would be rash to suggest that India had arrived, given the immense internal disparities and challenges. The Indian elephant, however, was on the move. Poverty was estimated to have declined by certain yardsticks, and if an 8.5 to 9 per cent growth rate could be maintained, per capita incomes were expected to double within a decade, rather than after 20 years at the earlier more modest levels of growth. Yet, the reality was that India's place in the UNDP's human development index kept hovering around the 127th position in a ranking of 177 countries—a dismal record and even below sub-Saharan levels in some cases. India topped the global listings for the number of its billionaires. But a distressingly large part of the population lived on a dollar a day or less, with many subsisting just above that level. Regional imbalances were also glaring, with east-central India accounting for much of the poverty belt.

Obviously, not all was well. There were serious infrastructural lags in every major field—energy, transport, port and airport capacity. This was the result of faulty political decision making and bureaucratic delays in a globalising world where capital was footloose and ready to go where it was able to get a good, quick return. The Left's 'outside' support for the UPA carried a price tag, with painful delays and denial in terms of various lost contracts and arrangements, many on ideological grounds. The reforming and industrialising Left Front chief minister of

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West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was a minor equivalent of China's Deng Xaioping, once described as a 'capitalist roader'. Unfortunately, what he proposed or did in Bengal was all right, but what anybody else proposed elsewhere in India was somehow taboo. It would be untrue to suggest that the government's reform programme faltered only because of Left opposition; but there is no doubt that the Left's ideological hangovers and determination to fight 'capitalist imperialism' did put the brake on a good many initiatives.

Among those so-called second-generation reforms were those relating to banking and insurance, pension funds, convertibility, labour and employment, electricity, foreign direct investment, disinvestment, pricing, subsidies, targeted public distribution systems and so forth. Some were ongoing, others needed acceleration; still others were proposed for liberalisation if not de-regulation. The underlying objective was to mobilise, generate or release long-term funds to sustain investment and growth, introduce flexibility and competition and enhance returns.

Critics however feared speculation, excessive market orientation at the cost of social and safety networks, and foreign penetration, harking back to the East India Company. Some measures were pushed forward, and certain others had perforce to wait on state level initiatives. Given an element of innate conservatism within the system, resistance from vested interests and ideological opposition from coalition partners, the impetus for reform slackened. Approaching elections too evoked caution in the wake of the controversies surrounding special economic zones (SEZs) and the Indo-US agreement on civil nuclear energy.

Inflation became worrisome for some time, with oil prices soaring from $27 per barrel to something approaching $150 per barrel in 2008. Food prices also started rising because of protectionist farm policies in the developed world and the diversion of land from food crops to bio-fuel plants to blend with or substitute for oil, in a bid to keep petroleum prices in check.

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The National Farmers Commission (NFC) under Dr M.S. Swaminathan signalled a farm crisis that could no longer be ignored. This was manifest in mounting suicide deaths by desperate farmers, growing indebtedness and stagnant food production leading to periodic food imports. Per capita rural incomes had fallen, causing a widening of the urban-rural divide. Certain pockets of the rural economy were no doubt flourishing but, overall, there was cause for anxiety. There were low

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average yields across the country with even Punjab, Haryana and western UP reporting plateauing outputs at current levels of research and farm practice.

The growing pressure of population on the land and a lack of commensurate non-farm employment had reduced the average size of holdings to 1.41 hectares by 1995-96, on account of fragmentation without corresponding consolidation. A National Sample Survey study indicated that, given the opportunity, as many as 40 per cent of the farming community would like to give up their agricultural occupation.

The NFC pointed to constraints on leasing-in and leasing-out of land by cultivators seeking viable operational farm holdings and those inclined to let out their farms and seek their fortune in off-farm or urban occupations. Despite the spread of irrigation, national cropping intensity was not satisfactory. Only 37 per cent of the arable land was under irrigation and able to grow a second or third crop. Groundwater was being mined, not harvested, in many 'black' zones, while an old-fashioned water bureaucracy that had grown up on supply augmentation with little knowledge or interest in integrated water resource management was unable to cope.

Skewed subsidies largely benefited better-off farmers, resulting in the over-exploitation of water, injudicious use of fertiliser and micro-nutrient deficiencies. At the same time, cropping patterns were changing with peasants switching from subsistence to market farming, now increasingly influenced by global trends. Farmers in Moga now rang Chicago traders on their cell phones to ascertain global prices and production trends. The acreage under coarse grains such as jowar, bajra and ragi had declined while that under oilseeds, fruit, vegetables and cash crops had registered an increase.

Regulated markets and other market mechanisms remained imperfect, especially for perishables, resulting in the harassment and exploitation of small and marginal farmers, who were compelled to resort to distress selling. Though the minimum support price and procurement policy covered 25 commodities accounting for 75 per cent of the crop value and 80 per cent of farm acreage, prices often ruled below minimum support prices in most parts of the county. The terms of trade had moved against agriculture. Altogether, there had been a fall in governmental and private investment in farming and hunger and malnutrition remained widespread.

The NFC, however, also noted some positive measures. These included the expansion of farm credit at lower interest rates, the creation of a national rain-fed area authority, the consolidation of sixteen different

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food processing regulations into one integrated food law, an enactment making warehouse receipts a negotiable instrument to prevent distress sales, and the spread of rural e-governance and extension. The e-Choupal launched in 2000 by the India Tobacco Company (ITC) took the IT revolution to Village India to exploit a fast-growing rural market. Within six years, the e-Choupal was catering to four million farmers engaged in growing a variety of produce.

These were welcome trends but more remained to be done. Land records were being updated and computerised, and land titles bestowed on owners. Recent agitations over land acquisition establish that land titles need to be determined and recorded with certainty to give vibrancy to the rural and urban land market.

Viable farming, perhaps, requires the voluntary creation of cooperatives for promoting agriculture, and group farming through self-help groups, particularly in regard to the joint use of pre- and post-harvest farm equipment, drip and sprinkler irrigation systems, integrated pest management and nutrient supply, food processing and group insurance. Contract and corporate farming are also practical ideas that can work subject to well-defined guidelines. Farming of homestead plots, an essential part of any agrarian reform package, holds out possibilities for intensive garden cultivation near towns with an assured market for vegetables, fruit, flowers and poultry. Kerala offers a good example of successful homestead farming. China's town and village enterprises could be emulated by our khadi and village industries at a higher level of sophistication, utilising farm produce and agro-wastes to manufacture a whole variety of goods and services. The panchayati raj ministry has advocated linkages between panchayats and industry to create rural business hubs. Nearly 850 products and blocks have been identified and some MOUs signed. Rural India awaits a revolution.

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As the population grows, a substantial section is perforce moving off the land, at first temporarily as distress migrants in search of seasonal employment, and then permanently to the cities, there to seek a new future in shanty towns and slums, with dreams of becoming 'slumdog millionaires' as in the Oscar-winning film of that name. The autumn of 2006 saw a furious debate rage across India. The headlines variously juxtaposed terms like SEZ, land, infrastructure, farming, modernisation, food security, dams, compensation, public-private, 'jobs' versus 'employment' (a distinction little understood), rural versus urban, agriculture versus industry, labour versus capital, mother tongue versus

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English. Translated, the dialogue was essentially about tradition versus modernity, past versus future. What the debate was not about, as mistakenly projected, was 'us' versus 'them'. We are all in this together.

The debate was triggered by an infrastructure deficit that has clearly retarded growth, income and employment generation, India's global competitiveness and poverty alleviation. It exposed dead habit, revivalism, social divisions and several inequalities. Many tend to hug a shameful poverty in the strange belief that it exemplifies simplicity and virtue. At another level, people are afraid of change. Every established status quo gathers around it a body of vested interests that fears anything different. This is what the Luddites believed, at the commencement of the industrial revolution in England. Neo-Ludditism or nostalgia confronts India today.

We must, of course, also heed Goldsmith's lament, 'Ill fares the land, to hastening ill a prey/Where wealth accumulates, and men decay'. The human and social decay we have permitted over the years must be corrected. But the prospects are grim, and India will be undermined if it does not accumulate wealth to sustain its burgeoning numbers. Landed farmers commit suicide, children remain unschooled, beggars abound and millions go to bed hungry. We must promote equitable growth, or let men decay.

The argument that the land diverted to special economic zones is needed to feed more Indians is specious. The stock of arable land is limited and increased farm production must come from greater productivity per unit of land and water. This would increase the labour intensity of agriculture and generate more employment while further investments bridge the infrastructure deficit and foster industrialisation, exports, urbanisation and services.

By 2006, some 181 SEZs had been approved, entailing an estimated investment of Rs 1,450,000 crores by 2012. A regulatory framework was envisaged to ensure equity, appropriate compensation and the resettlement of those displaced. R&R would have to move away from the futility of 'land for land' to re-housing and stakeholder participation, and a share in the future stream of benefits for those displaced, with training facilities for new employment opportunities being created by or around the new industries or projects coming up there.

It was rightly urged that good arable, especially irrigated land should not be acquired unless absolutely necessary, and that excessive land acquisition for an SEZ or other 'public purpose' should not mask 'land grab' or profiteering in real estate. Some part of the appreciation in land values with development should be given back to those from whom it

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was acquired in the first instance. Innovative ideas have been mooted to achieve this objective, within an enlarged concept of corporate social responsibility and new legislative frameworks. Meanwhile, to decry industry, urbanisation or private enterprise as pandemics and see reputed corporate houses, long knocking at the door with large and obviously worthwhile investments, as vectors of some dread disease, betray a fevered imagination.

The land loss, even more so of fertile arable land, is very modest and despite tax breaks, the commerce ministry calculates the returns in terms of income, exports and employment will be far greater. Moreover, if there is insistence on housing and social infrastructure in SEZs it is not to pander to real estate interests but to ensure that industry does not pass these burdens to overloaded municipal agencies, as in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Gurgaon and, instead, stimulates planned urbanisation in greenfield areas. It would be foolish to look on SEZs as a panacea for all the country's ills. But they represent a new strategy that has worked well elsewhere to stimulate growth, not at the cost of farming or the poor, but as part of an integrated programme in which human resource development and poverty alleviation remain core values.

Land acquisition for industry, dams, ports and power stations is a sensitive issue as land represents not only livelihood but homes, a way of life, an identity. There have been controversies galore about dams, coupled with the attendant issues of displacement and submergence. A new and forward-looking R&R policy has been worked out, and governments increasingly require promoters to acquire the bulk of the land themselves, reserving the power of eminent domain only to overcome the problem of isolated holdouts, as a last resort. Private negotiations have oftentimes ended very satisfactorily, with those who have lost their land pleased to walk away with a substantial amount that will enable them to educate their children and train and invest in new means of livelihood.

The outcry over land acquisition reached a crescendo over the Nano, Tata's small car project in Singur, and a proposed chemical hub at Nandigram, both near Kolkata. After years of disinvestment and industrial stagnation in Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya argued that it made good sense to be generous in order to attract flagship investments and leading entrepreneurs. Many states were eyeing the Nano project hungrily and, having initially got it, West Bengal anticipated a huge multiplier through the development of related ancillaries and services.

The Trinamool Congress led agitation was partly political but had a genuine basis for discontent in that Bengal's vaunted land reforms had

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stopped in the 1980s, with a politically ascendant CPM finding it convenient to absorb within its cadres small landowners or *jotedars* willing to buy peace, forgetful of the fact that a layer of sub-tenants and the landless had been left out in the cold. Further, over the span of a generation, holdings had fragmented and a number of cultivators were finding farming unviable. So while patta-holders received compensation from Tata in accordance with the list of title holders provided by the state, under-tenants and agricultural labourers were marginalised. In the end, Tata pulled out and the Nano migrated to Gujarat.

At Nandigram, rumours of land acquisition based on a premature announcement by a local official sparked protests, which got out of hand on account of the strong-arm methods used by Marxist cadres to suppress it. Naxalites and other malcontents added fuel to the fire, although the government announced it was moving the proposed chemical hub to another site—Nayachar. There were similar agitations elsewhere, opposing steel, aluminium, power and port development.

Around 80 to 90 per cent of the country's mineral wealth, a great part of its tropical forests and the bulk of its headwaters, other than those emanating from the Himalayas, lie in the heartland of middle and peninsular India and the North-east. These are home to India's ninety million tribal people, and are ethno-culturally and ecologically sensitive regions. Tribal sensitivities have, understandably, been hurt by long years of neglect, exploitation and indignities, which have given rise to protest movements and Naxalism. Yet an industrialising India can scarcely renounce the richest part of its natural resource base. Quite obviously, callous and uninformed approaches to development must give way to a new paradigm of sustainable development, in partnership with the tribal people, and in keeping with their interests and ethos.

With rapid post-reform, growth-related industrialisation and exports and the need to expand every kind of infrastructure, there was a corresponding rise in demand projections for steel, coal, power, aluminium and water storage for irrigation, industry and municipal supplies. In view of the past experience of poor planning and R&R and unimplemented promises of a new deal, tribal communities, assisted by environmental and human development oriented NGOs, resisted what they feared could be a culturally and ecologically destructive invasion of their lands, in violation of both law and equity. Failure to take these communities along and get-rich-quick deals between corporates, officials and other vested interests soon saw the battle lines drawn between 'us' and 'them', industry and agro-forestry, town and country.

In keeping with the country's assumed growth trajectory, the

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Government of India projected a sharp increase in steel production, by 40 to 60 million tonnes, to attain a target of 120 million tonnes by 2020. This would be through greenfield mega plants in the Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Bengal coal-ore belt, alongside accompanying ore mines, power plants, aluminium smelters, industrial water facilities, rail, road and port connections, telecommunication links and related townships. All this would entail land acquisition and stripping hills and forests in a largely rolling tribal countryside.

Specialised power, steel, mining and aluminium hubs were planned to garner the benefits of scale and synergy as seen in Orissa's Vision-2020 road map. And queuing up to make these mega investments were corporate leaders like Tata, Essar, Jindal, Larsen and Toubro, Lakshmi Mittal, South Korea's Pohang Steel Company (POSCO), Sterlite (Vedanta) and several public sector giants, all jostling for advantage. They also offered a variety of packaged benefits including resettlement, compensation, training and employment, many of them open to improvement through negotiation and steadily advancing notions of corporate social responsibility.

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The story of Tata's proposed six-million-tonne Kalinganagar steel plant in the tribal Jajpur district of Orissa, POSCO's MOU for a twelve-million-tonne integrated steel plant in Jagatsinghpur, near Paradip, together with mines and a captive port, and Vedanta's million-tonne aluminium refinery and nearby bauxite mine and smelter in the Kalahandi district were typical of long-planned but partially or completely frustrated development.

Problems arose from faulty land titles, sequential acquisition and the sale of land at varying prices, encroachers, contested benefits and so forth, some of these distorted by emotion, misrepresentation, doubts created by past experience, the lackadaisical conduct of public hearings, lack of trust, and ideology. Protests, blockades and police action aggravated tensions. Litigation added to the delay.* There were similar stories from Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra, although progress was reported in certain other cases. The Jindal mega steel plant in Bengal, for instance, had relatively smooth sailing.

While tribal lands cannot be transferred to non-tribals in Fifth Schedule areas, an ambiguity arose as to whether this prohibition applied to

*See my book, *Rage, Reconciliation and Security: Managing India's Diversities* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008).

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government lands in those regions in Andhra where mining leases had been granted to private parties. The matter went to the Supreme Court which gave a seminal ruling. The Samatha judgment, 1997, stated that a lease or land acquisition for a public purpose did not entail a transfer. The rich mineral wealth in Scheduled Areas constituted a national asset and the competing rights of tribals and the state were 'required to be adjusted without defeating the rights of either', in the interest of national development.

The court noted that the governor was empowered to transfer state lands even in Scheduled Areas. But in the case of such a transfer, the non-tribal lessees must also assume the state's constitutional obligation to improve the social, economic and educational condition of the tribals. Therefore, the licensee or lessee should, as part of the project, 'incur expenditure' for the reforestation and maintenance of the ecology of the Scheduled Area; maintain roads and communication facilities within the 'impact area' of the industry or enterprise, ensure medical cover, housing and sanitation, establish hospitals, primary and secondary schools and provide vocational training to tribals to qualify them for employment. To this end, 'at least 20 per cent of the net profits should be set apart as a permanent fund' and be reflected in the annual budget of the enterprise, over and above the expenditure incurred for reforestation and maintenance of the ecology. For its part, the Centre should sanction exemption of this entire amount from income-tax.

In 2001, the court declined to extend the Samatha ruling to Madhya Pradesh, leaving it to each state to fashion its own rules. But the principles enunciated offer a basis for formulating national guidelines that set minimum standards. This is important not merely in the interests of justice to the tribal people, but to stem and reverse Naxalite inroads into tribal areas.

More recently, with the global recession, the rush to set up SEZs ebbed and even notified SEZs are going slow. But the policy has succeeded in its objectives. To put matters in perspective, out of 568 formal SEZ approvals, as of May 2009, 315 SEZs had been notified and 144 were operational, or in various stages of work-in-progress, with an investment just short of Rs 100,000 crores, providing additional employment to around 135,000 persons and accounting for exports worth about Rs 100,000 crores, in 2008-09. The overall land area acquired for all approved SEZs up to date is 1906 square kilometres, which includes agricultural land, accounting for no more than 0.117 per cent of India's farmland.

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Writing in 2006, I noted that Middle India was under siege along a long-neglected, ill-governed, poorly connected poverty belt of forest and hill country covering contiguous areas in nine states 'from Pashupati (in Nepal) to Tirupati' along a Red Corridor. This is Dalit-tribal India—Santhal-Oraon-Munda-Gond—and defines the geography of Indian 'Maoism'. At its heart lies Chattisgarh, at the crossroads of the Naxal-affected badlands in six states. Until 2000, this was a remote corner of Madhya Pradesh, one of the more backward states in India. Within Chattisgarh, the former princely state of Bastar was a forgotten backwater within which, again, Dantewada still remains the most neglected of its three new districts. It partly incorporates Abujmarh (the Unknown Land), a territory the size of Haryana, more or less constitutionally 'excluded' in British times and largely ignored by the administration since, barring two forays to settle East Bengal refugees in Dandakaranya in 1958, and to extract high-grade iron ore from the Bailadila Hills. This back-of-beyond tract, inhabited by primitive tribes, was being properly surveyed for the first time through remote sensing in 2005.

Regions rapaciously exploited for generations by feudal-caste oppressors, robbed the underclass, especially tribals and Dalits, of their forests, land rights and human dignity, with the connivance of successive governments of all hues. They became incubators for the Naxals who, after 1967, aroused political consciousness and preached revolutionary liberation through class annihilation, surrounding cities from the countryside and wresting state power through the barrel of a gun. With pressure on the People's War Group and Maoist Communist Centre cadres in Andhra and Bihar/Jharkand before they united, the Naxals sought refuge in the jungles of Dantewada-Abujmarh, their first revolutionary liberated zone and the launching pad for the establishment of a so-called New Democratic Society.

Under Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh was far away from the power-centre, Bhopal. The accepted policy was to 'live and let live'. The state did what it could where it could; for the rest, the devil could take the hindmost. The new Chattisgarh state abandoned the earlier policy of abdication in favour of constitutional assertion, by extending its administrative writ and promoting development. Confrontation was inevitable. Casualties have run to hundreds. The Naxals have mined the roads extensively and now launch large-scale assaults.

The Naxals first came to the tribals as friends and teachers but gradually assumed dominance, seeking enrolment of a male or female from each family to their cadres, collecting a grain tithe, insisting on the

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cultivation of distributed lands to fill the party larder, imposing a levy on all traders and contractors and barring development, especially of roads, culverts and bridges, hand pumps, schools and panchayat ghars, so as to prevent connectivity and administrative penetration, which might threaten their supremacy.

In Chattisgarh, 2004 and 2005 were drought years. The Naxals insisted on a steep increase in tendu (beedi) leaf prices, which contractors found unviable. So there was no tendu plucking during April-May 2005, nor any government bonus that follows final market sales, thus depriving the tribals of their main source of cash income from minor forest products, in an otherwise subsistence-barter economy. Resentment sparked tension, and spontaneous marches and meetings in Kotru in western Dantewada to resist further Naxal diktats.

Politicians smelt opportunity and, under the banner of Mahendra Karma, the Congress leader of the Opposition and a tribal from the district, assumed leadership of the Salwa Judum, or 'purification/peace hunt', a vigilante village defence force, to combat the Naxals. A similar Jan Jagran Abhiyan had failed in the mid-1990s for lack of support. Now the BJP government readily clambered on the bandwagon.

The narrative becomes murky at this point and the sequence of events unclear. Much is anecdotal. Clashes, reprisal killings and the torching of huts created divisions among the people, some 45,000 of whom fled (were brought?) to miserable roadside camps as victims of a disaster they did not fully comprehend. Fear and compulsion kept them there, though some would have returned to their deserted villages if permitted to do so, or had they been given security. Several among the 5000 or so Salwa Judum vigilantes, under-aged youth among them, were recruited as Special Police Officers, given rudimentary training and placed alongside the CRPF and other para-military units to provide camp security and man roadblocks. They constituted an aggressive rabble and seemed to be under nobody's control.

A hapless government used an incipient popular upsurge to confront the Naxals, but soon lost the plot as it lacked a clear strategy. It was confused, defensive and defiant in turn. It claimed to have merely supported the Salwa Judum, and denied any plan to clear the jungles to regroup villages. Critics, however, alleged that this was a diabolical prelude to the granting of mineral and industrial (read steel) licences to large corporate houses, without much protest or squeamishness about land acquisition in tribal-protected Fifth Schedule areas, within a quiet forest. This may appear a far-fetched theory though there have undeniably been some mala fides. In fact, significant corporate

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investments that open up the area, in partnership with the tribals, could be part of the solution.

With the approaching 2006 monsoon, the government assisted a fluid camp population to construct semi-permanent mud-brick houses with better roofing and minimal services. Epidemics threatened otherwise. Beyond that, there was no official plan or thinking. Rations were withdrawn and people made dependent on food-for-work, which was yet to be widely organised. The camps that were being 'consolidated' were ostensibly to be wound up by the following year. The unspoken hope was that people would be able to return home by then.

With para-military reinforcements coming in, a crackdown was on the cards. The new Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Kanker was busy training new commando-style police jungle fighters. Great sensitivity and care will be needed to ensure that tribal life and culture are not torn apart in battling the Naxals. A law and order approach by itself will not suffice. The Bastar and Sarguja Development Authority and a similar body for a scheduled caste zone had been set up under the chief minister, and special funds sanctioned. A coherent approach and delivery system seemed lacking as the existing administrative machinery could not cope with the problem. Eight of Chattisgarh's sixteen districts are Naxal-affected. The Salwa Judum is limited to part of Dantewada and not all among the political class, bureaucracy or ordinary people want it to spread. Its alleged misdoings need to be investigated. The policy too needs to be better concerted across states and the Centre has to play a leading role rather than merely utter exhortations from afar after tolerating and partnering rampant misgovernment for decades.

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I was part of the Independent Citizens' Initiative fact-finding team to Chattisgarh and our report was made available to the state and central governments, the NHRC and the Maoist leadership. We were critical both of the government and the Naxals. Our primary demand was for a ceasefire, a national dialogue, and that both sides should enable villagers to return home. We also called for a comprehensive and impartial inquiry into all incidents of violence and the punishment of those responsible. We wrote to the home minister with suggestions for action and copied this to the prime minister. We said:

> The Governor of Chattisgarh may be requested to examine this report and inquire into the submissions made under the terms

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of Section 3 of the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution. This provides that 'The Governor of each State having scheduled areas therein shall annually or whenever so required by the President, make a report to the President regarding the administration of the scheduled areas in that state and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of directions to the State as to the administration of the said areas'.

The mechanism for inquiry by the Governor can be direct or through the agency of the Tribal Advisory Council mandated by Section 4(1) and Section 4(2) of the Fifth Schedule. These sub-sections state that 'it shall be the duty of the Tribes Advisory Council (whose composition is set out in the Constitution itself) to advise on such matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes of the State as may be referred to them by the Governor'. Section 5(2) further states that 'The Governor may make regulations for the peace and good governance of any area of the state which is for the time being a Scheduled Area'.

Our submission is that Schedule 5 constitutes a social contract between the Union of India and its tribal citizens and the Governor, as the agent of the Union, has the requisite powers and a constitutional obligation to discharge in this regard within the established federal framework of the Constitution . . .

In a response to our plea through the columns of the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai, Ganapathi, secretary general of the CPI (Maoist), hinted that the Maoists were prepared for a dialogue, given the appropriate conditions. He asserted that they are not opposed to 'people-centred development' or schooling and would not target school buildings if these are not used by the security forces.

Could schools, then, in any agreed area within a district or sub-division be declared 'zones of peace' for delivering elementary education, primary health, water supply and sanitation, and basic needs to the community without threat or external hindrance? This would involve guarantees regarding the safety of the children, their parents, teachers and others who support the system and service school-feeding programmes, and so forth. UNICEF has experimented with this school-peace zone approach in certain conflict situations. Should such a proposal, sincerely implemented, generate trust, the ambit of agreed community-building activities could be enlarged within an expanding area and in an environment of peace. It might gradually be demonstrated that there

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are better ways of serving the cause of development and social justice than through threats of violence.

We wrote to the home minister:

> While we are not satisfied with the Maoist response in important respects, we do detect some positive elements in their statement . . . We would like to encourage the Maoists to think of widening and hardening the areas of seeming agreement and possibly enter into a dialogue in this regard.
>
> The Prime Minister has publicly affirmed that the Government is willing to talk with any party without preconditions other than that it abjures violence.

UPA-II has since initiated measures to combat the rising Maoist menace with concerted action based on targeted intelligence. This has begun to yield results. The strategy is to gain area dominance, extend connectivity and initiate development, and then move inwards. It has more recently offered to enter into a dialogue with the Maoists if they abjure violence and extortion and communicate this intent directly to the government. Pressure is mounting on the Naxals with divisions in their ranks, and some loss of public support as a result of mindless killings. But there is a long, hard road to travel.

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A historical injustice was done to tribal India with the usurpation of their age-old forest rights by the creation of reserved forests, protected forests, game parks, bio-sphere reserves, buffer zones and the Forest Conservation Act. All these were intended to protect the ecology and promote commerce at the cost of the tribal people who have been the traditional guardians of forests and live in a symbiotic relationship with them. Tribal rights, converted into 'privileges', are overseen by petty forest officials, the police and minor forest produce and liquor contractors who know how to manipulate the system. 'The dignity of the individual' enjoined by the Preamble to the Constitution has been trampled upon in the past by multiple displacements, indifferent or capricious R&R, and the heaping of indignities on these simple but proud people, docile and trusting unless aroused.

Despite the special protection given to tribals under the Fifth Schedule and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, governors and Parliament—the guardians—have been in serious default in disregarding these safeguards. My criticism was endorsed by the 2008 report of the Planning Commission's Expert Group, 'Development Challenges in

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Extremist Affected Areas', which, once again, sternly indicted the persistent failure of the government in dealing with the socio-economic factors underlying the rise and spread of Left Wing Extremism in India, earlier noted by the dedicated commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Dr B.D. Sharma, and others. It mentioned how the Green Revolution had been allowed to turn red, as forecast, on account of the failure to implement agrarian reforms, especially with regard to recording cultivation rights, ensuring security of tenure, safeguarding sharecroppers, enforcing minimum agricultural wages, providing homestead plots to an estimated eight million homeless families, protecting common property resources and distributing waste and bhoodan lands.

Impunity and immunity have marked rampant violations. This has particularly hurt Dalits and has been true of violations of tribal forest rights. The report is scathing:

> There is ... a failure of governance, which has multiple dimensions and is not confined to the inefficiency of the delivery system only. It is not fortuitous that overwhelmingly large sections of bureaucracy/technocracy constituting the delivery system come from dominating landowning castes or well-to-do middle classes, with their attachment to ownership of property, cultural superiority, purity-pollution governed behaviour and a state of mind which rationalises and asserts their existing position of dominance in relation to others ... Politics has also been aligned with this social sector which constitutes the power structure ... It is this collection of interests and social background that deeply affect governance at all levels.

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The government's policy paper on the Naxal issue posits a holistic approach with the emphasis on socio-economic development. But little development is possible without a refurbished administrative structure that is decentralised, operates a single-window and is staffed by dedicated cadres like the former Indian Frontier Administrative Service, which was unwisely disbanded around 1969. Furthermore, there must be dialogue. Andhra agreed to negotiate through a Committee of Concerned Citizens. This came to naught but helped clarify a number of issues and pointed the way for constructive action on both sides.

In the absence of any ready mechanism to grapple with such problems of a society in radical transition, thought should be given to establishing

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a credible neutral body whose good offices can be used by the government and non-state actors alike to establish contact, exchange ideas and facilitate dialogue. The model that suggests itself is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Indian Red Cross, currently a somewhat insular body, might be reinvented for the task with legal and conflict-resolution personnel.

The Expert Group on the Prevention of Alienation of Tribal Land and its Restoration (2004) referred to land and rights alienation and corporate intrusions into tribal domains as constituting unequal bargains with inadequate compensation or poorly implemented R&R. It concluded that this had given rise to the Tribal Dilemma:

> Submission to 'nationalism' through 'mainstreaming' would lead to 'sub-infeudation' and 'bondage' while more vigorous assertion of their rights through 'sub-nationalism' leads to falling a victim to the lures of 'radicalism' and even to 'irredentism'.

Indeed this is what has happened with the spread of Naxalism and insurgency. These are not mere 'law and order' problems, with the 'law' being most often used to maintain the 'established order'. The Tribal Forest Rights Act rejects the theory that forests are wilderness areas rather than traditional tribal habitats. And tribal stewardship under law is seen to offer the best hope of conserving and sustaining the nation's forest wealth. For this tribals must be restored their rights and empowered to discharge their obligations. Conservation must lead to integration not exclusion.

There is no dichotomy between tribes and wildlife or bio-diversity. The act includes tribes living in or proximate to forests and non-tribal 'encroachers' who have been officially resettled in or around forests within its protective ambit. It would restore the habitats of evicted peoples within a cut-off date of December 2005 (when the bill was introduced) and substitute 'core areas' in relation to wildlife protection with a concept of 'critical wildlife habitats'. The definition of minor forest produce was expanded and its collection and processing de-nationalised. It seeks to make the tribals partners in natural resource exploitation through industrialisation. The gram sabha would also be empowered as the basic democratic entity for consent to and the regulation of development decisions affecting tribal rights for proven 'public purpose'.

Riding in tandem with tribal exploitation has been Dalit oppression in a still-hierarchical society, constituting a 'social democracy deficit' that Ambedkar warned could be India's undoing. Caste discrimination,

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though ameliorated in some aspects, remains a matter of abounding shame, which the politicisation of caste in the game of vote-bank politics and the status consciousness of upwardly mobile groups have accentuated.

Caste in the classical age was eulogised by some as an ordering of society that ensured social equilibrium, but it has been a curse for those stigmatised by it. No wonder that nineteenth and early twentieth century social reformers worked for the removal of its manifest inequities. But even the Indian National Congress, when founded in 1885, set itself up as a political forum that united all nationalists and created a separate Indian National Social Conference to agitate for more divisive social reform issues! The Gandhi-Ambedkar debate, the Dravida movement, the Dalit Panthers and Kanshi Ram's Backward and Minority Communities' Employees Federation (BAMCEF) marked different stages of the political evolution of the Dalits, until the emergence of Mayawati as the spokesperson of the Bahujan Samaj Party, standing for the welfare of all.*

Reports of atrocities against Dalits—a scheduled caste woman sarpanch being auctioned by superior caste members in a Tamil Nadu village, for example—point to the fact that special laws to protect SCs and STs, such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act, have often remained a dead letter. Their effective implementation is frustrated by indifference, social bias, routine observance of procedures and even withdrawal of registered cases. And conviction rates are less than 1 per cent! The Sachar Report on the Muslim condition (2008) too speaks of indignities against vast numbers of citizens. This constitutes a mockery of Fraternity, that sacred constitutional promise. The country cannot long endure as a dual society, 'Bharat' and 'India', 'we' and 'they'.

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The Sachar Report is not the first of its kind, only the latest. From 1857, when Mughal power was finally and formally extinguished, the Muslim elite felt disempowered, a feeling that men like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan sought to dispel through modern education. However, the community turned inward and thereby lost its competitive edge. The result was reflected in Sir William Hunter's 1870 report, 'Our Indian Musalmans'. This revealed the marginalisation of the Muslim Indian in the civil services and professions. Partition dealt the community another blow.

Sporadic efforts to correct lags and biases have been neutralised by

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*See my book, *Rage, Reconciliation and Security: Managing India's Diversities* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008).

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the growth of the Hindu Right and the stereotyping of Muslims as covert Pakistanis and terrorists, in the context of Kashmir and international developments. Rath-Ayodhya politics, cynically played and climaxing in the Gujarat carnage, as much as vote-bank politics on the other side combined with jihadi outrages have further vitiated the atmosphere. The writing is on the wall. Tens of thousands are on the march, demanding dignity. The gun cannot be the default option.

The Sachar Committee's thoughtful report makes sombre reading. More than making nonsense of 'Muslim appeasement', the report constitutes a national indictment of gross discrimination and benign neglect. The Muslim population of India was 15 per cent in 2001. Add another 30 per cent for Dalits and tribal Indians, plus the genuinely depressed layers of the OBCs. No democratic society can endure, let alone prosper, with this magnitude of those who are deprived, discriminated against and excluded. Here is a huge civic deficit that must be ended.

It would be wrong and dangerous to dismiss the Sachar report as vote-bank motivated, divisive or old hat. Some myths are demolished: that Muslims shun modern education and flock to madrasas (only 4 per cent do so); that they are averse to family planning (fertility rates are in decline); and that demographically they will, before long, swamp the rest. Two factors lie at the root of the Muslim problem, educational backwardness and biased socio-administrative mindsets.

Of these, the first is the more fundamental. Education opens the door to equality of opportunity, with schooling as the foundation. Access, retention, quality (of teaching, textbooks and infrastructure) and initial instruction in the mother tongue matter. Given this, vocational and higher and professional education will follow. But to accomplish the first step satisfactorily and soon, the Sachar Committee recommends that the fifty-eight districts of Muslim concentration be targeted. Simultaneously, madrasas should be enabled to modernise and issue recognised certificates so that their alumni can be mainstreamed into higher education. Girls' education merits particular emphasis, with provision for more female teachers, scholarships and hostels as a necessary adjunct.

The comparative statistics of employment are dismal, whether in government, PSUs or the corporate and private sectors. Muslim job ratios are a quarter or less in relation to their population. This cannot be attributed solely to lower educational attainments. Because of their lower visibility in public spaces—in the administrative, police and security services, in the judiciary, corporate world, professions and

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public life, and especially at local body levels of democratic participation and decision making—Muslims are diffident about competing for jobs and do not come forward in sufficient numbers. The committee also pointed out that several constituencies of Muslim concentration are reserved for Scheduled Castes when other constituencies would better qualify. Such aberrant delimitation must be corrected.

The community has a perception of being discriminated against. Though exaggerated in some cases, discrimination is certainly evident in access to social infrastructure (health, water supply and sanitation, transport and communications) and bank finance. Muslims are also unable to rent accommodation in cosmopolitan areas/buildings, leading to their involuntary ghettoisation. Some handicaps are general rather than community-specific and stem from poverty. Many can be cured by extant poverty alleviation and basic needs programmes and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Muslims fall into three broad caste categories, the ashrafs or upper castes, the ajlafs, who are OBCs, and arzals, equivalent to the Most Backward Castes who perform menial tasks. Muslim OBCs account for 40 per cent of the community and 15 per cent of the overall OBC population, and are particularly disadvantaged. The committee recommends affirmative action as a means of ameliorating the condition of the ashrafs but would lump the ajlafs with the OBCs and the arzals with SCs for reservation. The committee was of the view that the process of promoting inclusive development and mainstreaming would be greatly assisted by a constantly updated national data bank and the establishment of appropriate fast-track mechanisms to ensure equal opportunities.

The suggestion that Muslim participation in all spheres of political life be buttressed through 'a carefully conceived "nomination" procedure' is more problematic. Nomination could become a dangerous crutch and lead to charges of political partisanship to win political support. There is much the community can do on its own, for instance, through better-managed and suitably reformed Waqf Boards. The Sachar Committee estimated their properties could yield an annual revenue of Rs 12,000 crores for a variety of projects that benefit the community.

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The Muslim condition is not uniform. By and large, the southern states are better off, while the situation in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam gives cause for concern. Overall, Muslims are a cut above SCs and STs, but rank below the OBCs. Muslim leaders must assess the

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modernisation bus post-1857 and again post-1947 (as a community under siege). With the loss of elite cadres to Partition, a 'secular' State mistakenly turned to clerics and conservatives as the authentic voices of Muslim opinion. Today, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board claims to speak for the community, thereby obstructing such modernising and long overdue measures as a uniform civil code that does no injury to anybody's personal code. Such anomalies must be rooted out.

Article 44 says that 'the State shall endeavour to secure for citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India'. This is a Directive Principle and not a part of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in Articles 25 and 26 that implicitly guarantee personal laws so long as they do not affect public order, morality and health. Thus there is no clash between a uniform civil code (UCC), the acceptance of which is purely voluntary, and personal laws. Yet, strangely, fervent secularists and rabid communalists have joined hands to scuttle a UCC over the years by confusing and confounding it as an attack on personal law and the Fundamental Right to freedom of religion. Goa has a UCC as part of its Portuguese legacy, while the extant Special Marriage Act constitutes an element of a uniform civil code. Muslims and Christians have, on inter-faith considerations, problems in adopting children except under the Wards and Guardians Act. Yet successive attempts to introduce an Adoption Act have been aborted. What a UCC essentially aims at is secular reform of property relations, in respect of which all faiths grossly discriminate against women. A UCC is, therefore, foremost a matter of gender justice. But male chauvinism and greed have joined religious conservatism to forge an unholy alliance to perpetuate a major source of gender discrimination, thereby impeding national integration and the modernisation of social relations.

With the slow but steady empowerment, modernisation and even globalisation of an increasingly mobile Indian society, the country's real diversity is becoming manifest. In the process, the old social order and traditional barriers of class, caste and creed are being challenged. Iniquitous social prohibitions and restraints, including those on women, are being falsely portrayed as religious verities to thwart secular reform. Codification of the numerous sub-texts of personal laws that exist among all Indian castes and communities is possibly overdue but is best left to the communities themselves. But clerics and fundamentalists can have no veto on social progress and national cohesion. The state's support to the fundamentalist opposition to the UCC illustrates a hollowing out of Indian secularism.

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The big word in the context of community and personal relations is not secularism, which was only inducted into the Constitution in 1976, but Fraternity or togetherness and oneness in terms of an equal and common citizenship. This forgotten concept must be embraced. With this, the vocabulary of 'secularism' must change. The Sangh Parivar's taunt of 'minority appeasement' is off the mark and the examples cited specious, but the constant reference to minorities does awaken 'majoritarian' sentiments.

Vote-bank politics has exaggerated the numerical aspect of the term 'minority', which has a more important behavioural connotation. Parsees, a microscopic community, do not behave like whipped or fearful minorities as they are a proud, confident and self-assured people. But Sinhalas in Sri Lanka and members of the extended Sangh Parivar in India do betray 'minority symptoms'.*

The BJP's electoral loss in 2004 persuaded some in the Parivar that it had lost ground for not being sufficiently assertive in regard to its Hindutva plank. Vajpayee's retirement brought Advani to the fore and paved the way for such a line of thought. The charge of minority appeasement was soon taken to another level by linking it with Manmohan Singh's 'weak' leadership, the upshot of which, it was alleged, was the government's 'soft stance' on terror, among other issues.

As Pakistan continued to patronise cross-border terror strikes, there was a clamour for stronger laws. It had been, for quite some time, India's boast that Muslim Indians had not turned to Islamic radicalism and none was involved in any act of jihad or terror. As time went by, however, it did appear that certain elements of the community had come to be indoctrinated. Police investigations of terrorist strikes threw up evidence of the complicity of certain radical networks (of which SIMI, the Student's Islamic Movement of India, was allegedly one), in certain terror strikes. Causative factors such as the complete travesty of criminal justice after the Gujarat carnage may explain but cannot extenuate this trend.

With the approach of elections, the closing months of 2008 witnessed

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*A.P. Joshi, M.D. Srinivas and J.K. Bajaj, *Religious Demography in India* (Chennai: Centre for Policy Studies, 2003), with a foreword by L.K. Advani, then deputy prime minister. The book displayed this 'majority-minorityism' in an acutely absurd form. The volume conjured up visions of (Hindu) India under dire threat, as the nation was being domestically and globally enveloped, emasculated and destroyed by a rising tide of Muslims and Christians, 'non-Indian religionists', who are seen virtually as foreigners.

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a marked spurt in the growth of soft terror. The BJP's national executive meeting in Bangalore saw the party president, Rajnath Singh, describe the Hindu cause, Hindu symbols and Hindutva as the face of BJP nationalism, which he juxtaposed with the appeasement of alleged Muslim separatists and terrorists by the UPA. Hindutva is not Hinduism, which is essentially a tolerant and catholic way of life and proclaims *vasudaiva kutumbakam* ('the world is one family') as its ideal.

Unfortunately, 'secular' India has permitted faith, festivals, processions and rituals to be blatantly used for political mobilisation. Thus, processions and their duration and decibel levels keep getting longer and louder. Where was the warrant for the 120-kilometre-long funeral procession of Lakshmananda Saraswati (the VHP swami, who had been campaigning for reconversion), after his brutal assassination in Kandhamals in Orissa, by Maoists, in August 2008?

The BJP's effort to pass off the Boudh-Kandhamal pogrom that year as an ethnic clash between traditionally antagonistic backward tribals and more advanced Dalit Christians masked the continuing VHP-Bajrang Dal campaign of forcible reconversion, going back to the gruesome Graham Staines murder. Although forcible conversion by Christian missionaries is constantly alleged, it is extraordinary that in no state that has adopted anti-conversion laws, Orissa included, has a single case been registered, let alone proved. On the other hand, tens of thousands of Christian refugees in the Kandhamal jungles were warned not to return to their devastated homes and livelihood unless they were prepared to undergo 'reconversion' or *ghar vapasi* (homecoming). The BJD-BJP government was supine.

The violence against Christians in BJP-ruled Karnataka subsided only after many weeks and much loss of life and property. The same Hindutva groups were responsible. Forcible conversions remain unproven. If some offensive anti-Hindu literature was circulated, this must be unequivocally condemned. But who produced and circulated this literature, and why was no action taken against those responsible? Instead, a whole community was targeted. Central directives to the Karnataka and Orissa governments were met with indignation.

Anti-Christian terror mapping places the bulk of the incidents in BJP ruled states, including MP, Rajasthan and Gujarat and wherever Hindutva groups are struggling to win turf, as in parts of Kerala. Conversion by force or allurement is wrong and any church or other group guilty of this—or of denigrating other faiths—deserves condign punishment. But to assume that all conversions must necessarily be 'forced' is to end freedom of conscience and of expression, and can only lead to a fascist

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state that believes in a one-nation, one-culture, one-people theory posited on the ideal of a master race. At the same time, one must unreservedly condemn the arrogant and offensive approach to proselytising by certain new, so-called charismatic church groups, mostly of North American origin, which seek to win souls through big money and media assaults.

Police leads in respect of the Malegaon-Modasa blasts in Maharashtra too suggest the involvement of the Bajrang Dal, VHP and other Hindu Right extremists, among whom Sadhvi Prayaga and the Bhonsala Military School in Nasik are being probed. Here again, it would be premature to rush to any conclusion pending further investigations. But interestingly, the BJP-Parivar line underwent a sea-change as soon as they felt the heat. The new credo is that 'terrorists have no religion'. To label people generically as Muslim or Hindu terrorists is to slander whole communities, the vast majority of whom are peaceful, law-abiding citizens living in harmony with their neighbours, irrespective of faith.

Equally noteworthy is the BJP-Parivar's latest thesis that a Hindu steeped in 'cultural nationalism' cannot be a terrorist. Such logic was earlier used by the VHP and Narendra Modi to brand Muslims and 'Miahs' as terrorists. Bal Thackeray believes that 'every day, Islamic terrorists are planting bombs to kill Hindus in India'. With Rajnath Singh, he feels Sadhvi Prayaga is being framed but argues that, like some ex-military personnel also under investigation for the Malegaon blasts, she cannot be blamed if she did indeed plant bombs. The Bajrang Dal activists, survivors of the Nanded explosion that occurred while they were making a bomb in April 2006, have been charged by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorist Squad in connection with three earlier bomb blasts in mosques, in 2003 and 2004.

Then, there is the soft terror being practised by the MNS-Shiv Sena goons in Mumbai, against non-Maharashtrians. Alas, past failure to act has created the monsters that now yell defiance at constitutional norms.

Equally pernicious are the periodic appeals to faith for narrow ends. It was, therefore, reassuring to read the judgment of Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul of the Delhi High Court dismissing the many frivolous cases filed against the country's greatest painter, M.F. Husain, now aged ninety-five, who has been forced into exile by bigots. The charges relate to the artist's canvasses depicting Hindu gods and goddesses in the nude and are based on the alleged offence to morals (prudery) and faith (blasphemy). The court dismissed these insinuations as reflecting the 'new Puritanism' of ignorant minds that could take the country back to the pre-Renaissance age. The attacks on couples courting and on 'pub-culture' manifest the same trend of moral policing, as does the hounding

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of Tasleema Nasreen (the controversial Bangladeshi writer, who has sought asylum in India), by conservative Muslim orthodoxy.

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Having politically squeezed the Ram Mandir lemon dry, the BJP has sought to make an issue of the Sethusamudram Canal that envisages cutting through Adam's Bridge, an underwater marine ridge formed in the Palk Straits aeons ago. The Ram Setu issue is still in the process of litigation and one continues to hear passionate arguments confusing faith with secular reality. Faith does not require legal proof. If millions believe in something, it is nobody's case that this should be disregarded within the bounds of the law.

None, therefore, questions the belief that the Ram Setu was built by the vanar sena to carry Ram's army across the sea to Lanka and it was unwarranted on the part of Karunanidhi to ask to know from which technical institute Sri Ram had acquired an engineering degree. The traditional belief will remain totally untouched even though a small channel is dredged to permit navigation through a section of the underwater ridge. Nobody is preventing worship at or veneration of any of the sacred sites associated with the Ramayana. In the United States, teaching Darwin's theory of evolution is taboo in a certain state as this is contrary to the Biblical story of creation, as told in the Book of Genesis! Do we likewise want to become prisoners of irrationality in India where every river, mountain, forest, sea and so much else is held sacred? Respecting belief is very different from being imprisoned by it.

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Fortunately, turnarounds are also apparent in parts of the country. Something is stirring in Bihar, long a symbol of despair. Bihar's decline became noticeable in the 1960s and reached its nadir in the last decade. A visit to the state on the first anniversary of the JD (U) government under Nitish Kumar, towards the end of 2006, suggested a whiff of change in the air. Ideas have begun to replace considerations of self and caste as drivers of policy.

Take the example of Kishenganj, for instance. It is at the bottom of the national district HDI league, second only to Shravasti in eastern UP. Its family planning and reproductive health indices are abysmal. Yet, remarkably, of the district panchayat members, including the district's 126 sarpanches, 50 per cent are women, most of them Muslim. The district's three MLAs, the district magistrate and senior officials spent two days reviewing family planning performance and discussing how

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to do better. This was an amazing example of social mobilisation in a district that did not then have a single girl's high school!

Bihar's August 2006 panchayat elections provided for 50 per cent reservation for women as well as for Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs). This has invested a hitherto disempowered and divided rural proletariat with dignity, encouraged their mainstreaming, and placed them at the helm of grassroots governance as exemplified by their recruitment of 250,000 village schoolteachers.

Political will has made a difference to the appalling law and order situation in the state. Rejuvenating the lowest rungs of the criminal justice system has increasingly helped the enforcement of the rule of law and reassertion of the cardinal principle of equality before the law. Judicial processes have been computerised and courts provided diesel generators to ensure continuous power. The high court has been brought up to full strength and fast track courts set up for quick investigation, witness protection and aggressive prosecution. All this has made for the speedy disposal of cases, under the close supervision of the Chief Justice.

Development is being promoted through an *aap ke sarkar aap ke dwar* (your government at your doorstep) programme. This is designed to meet basic needs—roads, bridges, irrigation, market connectivity, literacy, health—initially in six Naxal-affected districts like Jehanabad. Retired army personnel have been engaged. Better security, law enforcement, speedy justice, grassroots empowerment and a new development thrust have had a salutary effect on the Naxal situation too, though the overall Maoist challenge remains.

A larger development and reform process has been set in motion. With the separation of Jharkhand, Bihar is India's least industrialised and urbanised state with a very high population density and land-man ratio. A more productive agriculture and agro-businesses that take people off the land are being seen as pillars of future development and progress. The potential for fruit and vegetables is to be exploited through contract farming. A land reform commission and a committee to look at common schooling were also set up, but their recommendations have, alas, been scuttled.

Meanwhile, a catastrophe long feared occurred on 18 August 2008. The wayward Kosi burst through its eastern embankment in Nepal at Kushaha, by-passing the Bhimnagar barrage and carving out a new course. Two districts in Nepal and ten in Bihar were inundated. While there was much breast-beating and charges of culpability were traded, I saw things differently:*

*See *The Tribune*, 3 September 2008.

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> Every disaster is a social leveller. The Kosi floods could be the harbinger of a New Bihar, a new land system, a completely new and rational farm layout with levelled fields, proper access roads, field channels and drains, homesteads, and a new cadastral record that confers land titles on actual tillers of the soil through a model law or special legislation that overcomes all previous encumbrances that have, except on paper, been removed by an act of God. A larger spatial and livelihood plan must be put together by a multi-disciplinary task force to conceptualise a credible future. There should be no going back to the economic neglect, dreadful social iniquity, feudal corruption and caste oppression of the pre-Kosi-breach era, this part of Bihar possibly being the most blighted region in the entire country. The flood has wiped the slate clean. We have a wonderful opportunity to write a completely new script that could put North Bihar in the vanguard of India's social and economic progress. Let adversity lead on to fortune.

Alas, that imagination was lacking. Yet, if Bihar can stay the course in building an inclusive and more egalitarian democracy, with an expanding agro-industrial base that addresses unemployment and ends increasing outward migration, that will be a turn-around, which all of India must support and applaud. The 2009 Bihar election results showed that the electorate agreed.

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Another area that merits a cheer relates to population stabilisation. The latest UN Population Fund Report estimates that India's numbers will be 1658 million by 2050, against 1408 million for China, 292 million for Pakistan and 254 million for Bangladesh. These are horrendous figures with huge implications for land-man ratios, increasing water stress, energy demands, livelihood, living patterns and much else. About a quarter of all humanity will be packed into South Asia and almost a fifth in India alone. Within India itself, patterns will vary. Southern and western India have commenced their demographic transition, whereas the central and eastern segments will not do so for several years. What should be of equal concern is that reducing numbers must be matched with a corresponding improvement in all the social indices that measure the quality of life. In this regard, the news from north-western India is not good. Punjab, Haryana and, particularly, Himachal are moving towards population stabilisation but with a tragic increase in male

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preference and female foeticide across all sections of society, rural, urban and upwardly mobile, as a result of deep-rooted traditions and prejudices regarding the comparative economic worth of the male as opposed to the girl child.

As an aside, India's Jews, an ancient and respected community, dwindled in numbers as many from Kerala and Maharashtra migrated to Israel after 1948. Now, another tiny Indian community, the Parsees, are shrinking in numbers, partly on account of emigration but more so because they marry late or do not marry at all, and refuse to accept as part of the community the children of mixed marriages. India's Parsee population peaked in 1941 and has been in continuous decline since, with numbers (in India) down to 69,601 in 2001. It is amazing how much so few have done for India.

Yet another major priority must be to ensure that a young though growing population with its larger workforce and lower dependency ratio does indeed translate into a demographic gain. This, however, will only be realised if basic needs are met, and the twelve million now being added to the labour force every year are gainfully employed. Given capital intensive, white collar and technologically-oriented patterns of development, employment has lagged with 'jobless growth'. This hiatus has been filled, to a considerable extent, by the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREGA), a monumental and complex programme.

NREGA has softened the harsh edges of poverty by providing one hundred days of guaranteed unskilled, manual rural employment annually. The unskilled, manual work provided is related to land and water development and improvement, plantations, and access roads, all geared towards regenerating the natural resource base that has suffered degradation. In association with gram panchayats, NREGA provides supplementary employment, without contractors or the use of machinery, during the lean season. Work sites must have certain amenities and the provision of crèches has augmented female attendance. As a rights-based, demand-driven programme, NREGA does not imply that every job card holder will wish to work for up to one hundred days, which is not a target to be attained. If the actual days worked fall short of the one hundred days guaranteed it presumably means that people have other employment avenues that they exploit. Not surprisingly, SCs and STs and other marginalised poor constitute the largest segment of beneficiaries for whom NREGA provides a valuable safety net.

Notified wages have been prescribed by states and are paid fortnightly, by cheque, into post office savings accounts or mobile ATMs. Forty-

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seven million savings accounts had been opened, giving a new dimension and dynamism to rural banking. Until the end of October 2008, 30.8 million households had been provided 1160 million person-days of employment with an investment of over Rs 14,150 crores. The impact of the programme, now extended countrywide in three phases, since its inception in 2006, has been manifest. Distress migration has come down while minimum agricultural wages have been forced up from Rs 65 to Rs 85 a day as farmers have had to make higher bids to hire scarce labour. Convergence with other rural programmes has proved mutually reinforcing, and life-cum-accident and health insurance has been extended to rural households through the Janashree Bima Yojana and Rastriya Swastha Bima Yojana.

The payments system is transparent and self-policing. There are systems in place to redress grievances. And dispute-resolution is being organised through lok adalats at the district level, under the auspices of the National Legal Services Authority. NREGA works ideally as part of the integrated district development programmes built bottom up. Since many schemes entail surveys, measurements, design and supervision, NREGA is developing a pool of technical and skilled personnel, including 23,000 engineers. Other core professionals are also being hired to assist self-help groups. And a marketing programme is being initiated to augment the income of artisans.

NREGA seeks to abolish rural poverty by 2015, by expanding both employment for wages and self-employment. Based on the pillars of participation, accountability, monitoring, vigilance and transparency, it aims to promote a climate of zero-tolerance for corruption. Progress has been uneven, and there is no doubt that flaws will be exposed and improvements will be necessary. But by becoming a platform for innovation and change, NREGA holds out the hope of a new rural future by building up farm capital assets, augmenting agricultural productivity and imparting a new dynamism to the rural economy. NREGA and panchayati raj are complementary and could, with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (for primary education), the National Rural Health Mission, Bharat Nirman and similar grassroots basic needs, rights-based programmes, become harbingers of a rural revolution. These are being underpinned by new nutritional delivery packages and insurance and pension safety nets.

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Education remains the neglected backbone of all progress and equal opportunity. There are laggard regions and quantitative increases in

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privileged categories with reservation or affirmative action at the level of higher, professional and technical education. This has not been without fierce controversy but the broad contours of policy have been defined.

The Supreme Court struck a blow for progress by ruling that while 27 per cent reservation for admission to higher educational institutions is in order for Other Socially and Educationally Backward Classes, a category that goes beyond mere caste, the 'creamy layer' must be excluded. Basically, reservation can now extend to 49.5 per cent, adding 27 per cent reservation for Other Socially and Educationally Backward Classes to the existing 22.5 per cent reservation for the SC and ST categories. For determining the creamy layer, while matriculation has been held not to end educational backwardness, a majority of judges have agreed that graduation may be taken as a cut-off point, with certain other criteria such as the payment of income tax, asset ownership and so on.

Be that as it may, the first issue that will confront universities will be the matching of the increase in seats with the requisite increase in the number of teachers and the expansion of classrooms, laboratories, library facilities, hostels and other infrastructure, taking into account the space available, as many institutions are already tightly packed. The threefold expansion in educational expenditure envisaged under the Eleventh Plan may ensure that funds are available. But translating funds into material and human assets has a lead time that cannot be wished away. Haste should not precipitate a fall in standards, which would be self-defeating and inimical to the country's best interests in a growingly competitive world.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) described knowledge and innovation and not mere literacy as the driver of India's future progress. The watchwords must be expansion, excellence and inclusion. Thus, even while achieving universal primary education, the country must ensure universal secondary education by 2015, with at least 15 per cent of those in the 18-25 age group enrolled in institutions of higher education, making the newly enacted Right to Education Act a reality This will require setting up 6000 new high quality model schools, with at least one in each block.

Vocational education will be promoted by a Skill Development Mission with adequate funding to establish 1600 new industrial training institutes and polytechnics, 10,000 new vocational schools and 50,000 new skill development centres. Examination reforms are under way and a new four-year rural medical course is on the anvil. In the next 5 years, 30 new universities are planned, with existing colleges of high standing being

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spun off as autonomous colleges and deemed universities. At the apex, many more IITs, IIMs and ITES, medical, agricultural, design, architecture and advanced R&D institutes are planned. New national standards and systems are contemplated too as part of a second IT revolution for better governance and service delivery.

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The country's manpower and knowledge base must be secure if it is to grow at 8 to 9 per cent and hold its own as an emerging power. However, global recession, climate change and some of the reworked estimates of the Club of Rome with regard to natural resource constraints should give pause.

The year 2009 marked the centenary of the publication of Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj'. Some of his premises and conclusions about machinery and competition may have been unduly pessimistic or, in the eyes of some, even outlandish. But there is, today, increasing agreement over his warning that nature has enough for everybody's need, but not for everybody's greed. The global meltdown has signalled the pitfalls of what Manmohan Singh called crony capitalism allied to casino capitalism. The post-war Bretton Woods institutions like the World Bank and IMF and the international financial system need reform, and must yield to more democratic systems and prudent norms.

Climate change too calls for moderating wasteful growth. The two together suggest prioritising social consumption (need) over excessive personal consumption (greed) and waste, with greater global equity and inclusion. Bhutan has led the world by proclaiming its preference for Gross National Happiness (sustainability, culture, faith, way of life, contentment) over Gross National Product. This dictates the need to review lifestyles within nations, regions and communities.

The global recession is beginning to show signs of lifting. In India the Sensex has rallied and 2008-09 registered a growth of 6.7 per cent, among the highest in the world. Addressing the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru had forecast that the next millennium would be an Asian Century. What is to be India's role in this unfolding? Three things have earned the country recognition and respect whatever its flaws and shortcomings: its truly remarkable democratic record as a developing society of extraordinary diversity; its reform-led economic growth that has created a large and growing market and vibrant middle class; and its emergence as a significant economic, military and technological player and partner with an influential diaspora, some nuclear muscle and growing soft power.

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India is increasingly finding a place in regional and global fora and its presence has been felt in the ASEAN Regional Forum, the G-20, WTO, BRIC, climate change councils and other bodies. It is pressing for reform in the UN system and the refashioning of the international financial architecture. It has entered into strategic dialogues and is testing the waters in forging security partnerships. It has cordial relations with the European Union, Russia, ASEAN and Africa and has initiated a new and productive relationship with the United States.

It was President Bush-II who recognised India's true significance as a democratic partner in the emerging world order. The Next Steps in Strategic Partnership was the precursor to the landmark civil nuclear agreement, 2008, a US-led but truly international understanding with the IAEA and Nuclear Suppliers' Group endorsement that ended India's nuclear apartheid and decades of hurtful dual-use sanctions. This has set India on the road to a more rapid expansion of its nuclear energy base, with access to uranium and advanced technology. This will help the country generate clean energy and yield a plutonium dividend that will enable it, within twenty years, to move into an indigenously sustained fast-breeder thorium fuel cycle.

Opposition to the nuclear deal was mostly ideological and political, coming from the Left and the BJP, and not excluding some scientific dissent. Manmohan Singh, however, staked his government's future on the deal, seeing it through a critical parliamentary vote that witnessed the BJP indulge in a failed cash-for-votes scam. The Left came out very poorly too. The civil nuclear deal is a unique agreement that leaves India's nuclear weapons posture and freedom of action unimpaired and well serves its interests.

India's relations with China are more problematic. Economic relations have grown exponentially and China is today a major economic partner. The People's Republic finally abandoned its untenable stance of not recognising Sikkim as part of India, but has dragged its feet on a boundary settlement and gone back on agreed principles in not merely laying claim to Tawang but much of Arunachal ('Southern Tibet') as well. It has sought to enter the Indian Ocean as a naval and not just a maritime power ('the Indian Ocean is not India's Ocean'). It has also greatly improved its lines of communication from West China to Tibet with the Golmud-Lhasa railway, its proposed extensions and an expanding road and air network. These developments should not throw India off balance. It is unlikely that 1962 can ever be repeated. China too, despite its extraordinary growth and latest display of economic and political muscle has vulnerabilities—Tibet and Xinjiang, the rural-urban

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divide and the tension between economic liberalisation and political regimentation among them.

A boundary differs from a border. The former is defined by a line marking the territorial limits of national sovereignty; the latter by a band of territory on either side of national boundaries that marks a transition zone whether in terms of race, language, ecology, commerce or culture. Indian diplomacy and political thought strangely failed to make the distinction in sixty years. The confusion stems from regarding security as an exclusively military concern, completely ignoring the social and economic dimensions of comparative development, national cohesion and the popular perceptions of border peoples and transactions that have a great bearing on national will and morale. A new border policy is now coming into place. With the Nathu La pass restored as a trade route, India need not be afraid to move from mere border trade in customary goods to inter-country trade. That would be one way of building a new relationship with China.

It is disappointing that India has been unable to mend fences with its South Asian neighbours. All have been through or are yet to emerge from a time of troubles. Sri Lanka defeated LTTE terror after twenty-five years of bloodshed. It must now win peace through genuine federalism and equal citizenship for Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims alike. And India must assist in this process.

Myanmar, the country of my birth, is still caught in the coils of a xenophobic military dictatorship that has tragically kept Aung San Suu Kyi and the democratic process in bondage for almost three decades. Bhutan has seen the voluntary abdication of an enlightened monarch to promote a nascent democracy. Nepal made a remarkable transition from revolutionary Maoism to democratic rule after deposing the king, but is still struggling to give itself a federal, democratic constitution and finds it expedient to invoke the Indian bogey, from time to time, as a balancer in its political evolution.

India has, after many years, been internationally de-hyphenated from Pakistan to a large extent, but a love-hate relationship has endured. Pakistan has, from birth, defined itself as India's 'other', strangely denying its identity, history, geography and culture. That has been its undoing. Kashmir is neither 'the unfinished business of Partition' nor the 'core issue' that divides two countries that have so much to share. That the 'two nation theory' was untenable, a passing tactical ploy at best, was evident in Jinnah's categorical rejection of it in his first address to Pakistan's Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947. But that sane advice was disregarded.

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In 1953, the Munir Commission inquiring into the anti-Ahmediya riots stated that Pakistan's Islamic scholars were sharply divided in defining who could be considered a Muslim, in the soon-to-become Islamic State of Pakistan. Islam became the touchstone of Pakistan's identity (though this was rejected by East Pakistan that same year), and Jammu and Kashmir its extra-territorial expression. The Army virtually took over the State, as Pakistan sought to wrest J&K by repeated invasions and cross-border jihadi terror. This has, not surprisingly, become a monster that now threatens to devour Pakistan, after it nurtured a Talibanised Afghanistan that has come to haunt it too. The murderous 26/11 attack on Mumbai was the most recent of a series of bloody terrorist strikes on India. Once again Pakistan has been in denial, as it has been since 1947.*

A distinction must be made between the people of Pakistan and the now-nuclearised rogue military-ISI-jihadi-feudal elements that have captured the State. The disastrous US role in militarising Pakistan as a 'frontline state', over many decades, must be reversed, and the democratic movement encouraged. The US war in Afghanistan and Barack Obama's AfPak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) strategies have thus far been part of the problem, rather than the solution. A regional approach is more likely to work with Iran, Russia, China, the neighbouring Central Asian States, India and a civilian-controlled or 'demilitarised' Pakistan playing a dominant mediatory and stabilising role, with the US-EU-UN backing up the tasks of reconstruction and peace-keeping in a neutral Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, the Manmohan-Musharraf plan for J&K, stalled by Musharraf's self-made troubles at home, must be enabled to move forward. I summed up my thesis in 'From Tragedy to Triumph'†:

> The Manmohan-Musharraf road map is based on the proposition that J&K's boundaries (read LOC) should be made irrelevant without impairing the sovereignty of the two countries. This formulation offers the possibility of fashioning a variety of trans-border mechanisms for trade, tourism, investment, cultural exchanges, and even for the cooperative management of the Upper Indus system in keeping with the Indus Waters Treaty, against the looming threat of climate change. All this could,

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*See my book, *A J&K Primer: From Myth to Reality* (Delhi: India Research Press, 2007).

†See *The Great Divide: India and Pakistan*, Ed Ira Pande (Delhi: India International Centre-HarperCollins, 2009).

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over time, result in the establishment of an informal or even formal joint consultative body, imbuing a united J&K with the characteristics of a confederation, a concept blessed by Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah in 1964. This entity would be cocooned within a South Asian Community to which SAARC members are already in principle committed. Alas, the present regime in Islamabad seems bent on resiling from that formulation under military-jihadi pressure as any such development would marginalise them.

Actually, the same formulation of a soft border between the two parts of J&K could, with modifications, apply to the Pakhtun marches along both sides of the Durand Line, and bring quietus to the troubled relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan (which is today part of SAARC). By this means Pakistan would be able to reclaim its geography history, culture and strategic depth, standing tall as the north-western bastion of South Asia.

For sixty years, India and Pakistan have suffered the lingering tragedy of Partition. A resolution of the kind envisaged could see a transition and transformation from tragedy to triumph as two estranged blood brothers come together to build a better future and enable South Asia truly to come into its own.

*

And so it was that the country moved into the 2009 poll over five phases in April and May. The BJP's negative campaign of denigration failed while the Left's opportunist Third Front, an essentially anti-Congress alliance, crumbled. Both took a drubbing, and are striving to recover. They are likely to make little impact unless they emerge as liberal right of centre and democratic socialist parties minus Hindutva and Left-dogmatism, respectively. Mayawati was cut to size but has yet to abandon her arrogant, authoritarian and self-aggrandising ways. The Congress has, hopefully, begun to reinvent itself with Rahul Gandhi leading its youth brigade.

Coalition politics remains a difficult and delicate process and governance will therefore often entail taking a step backwards after two forward steps, or pausing before moving forward again. Generational change is gradually compelling parties to look ahead rather than live in the past.

If I have been roundly critical of many events and trends in these pages it has been to sound a note of caution rather than utter a cry of

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despair. I have been an incorrigible optimist about India and its inner resilience, diversity and values that will ultimately triumph. There is a great churning going on and much scum has surfaced. But this will be skimmed off and there will be a cleansing. India is today far stronger, more stable and more democratically rooted and integrated than ever before.

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POSTSCRIPT

Life is a journey, and travel entails packing. Jamila is always in a tizzy about packing. She can garden and do the vases but just cannot pack. I do the job. The largest suitcase is stuffed full for every climate, occasion and eventuality. Finally, when the box is sat upon by all the family, grudgingly shuts and is locked, she will with anxious innocence ask if her hot water bottle, medicines and torch are in. Who knows? Does it matter? But try arguing with an irately tearful wife about such matters! The suitcase is gingerly re-opened. Lo and behold, more goes in! Don't ask what. Packing for Jamila is an art.

Though I prefer to travel light, I do confess I feel much the same as Jamila about packing this volume. A lot has gone in, not always properly arranged, and creases will crumple. Much has been packed, but some memories gathered over the years simply cannot be left out. The publishers have already hinted darkly that the book is too long. But let me slyly open my travel box and slip in some nostalgia while nobody's looking.

What else shall I recount from a treasure-house of memories? Returning home in Bombay from the office, late at night during the 1965 war, to discover Jamila and the boys under the bed, fully dressed, shod in canvas shoes and armed with badminton racquets with which to deliver the enemy a punishing backhander, before sprinting away to freedom! Family holidays by car, with the boys. And yes, there was the more recent family trip to Kerala's lush backwaters and mountains that enabled us to meet the last of a fading generation of our extended family.

What about the two brides coming home, with three lovely grandchildren to follow . . . and the two other families I acquired in the bargain. I did not realise I'd married a mother-in-law and a granny to

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boot! Yet strangers, young and old, constantly keep coming up to Jamila in markets, theatres and on the street to tell her how beautiful she looks, especially with that flower in her hair. Now don't get sentimental, man. Get on with it!

Rollicking Christmas parties at home with carols, cake, punch and lots of friends. Plunging into authorship and writing columns. Meeting young people with stars in their eyes, and learning from them while engaging their curiosity to know more. Monday faculty meetings at the CPR when it takes no more than thirty lively minutes, sometimes maybe forty, to crack every problem and set the world right. Over four decades of Saturday Lunch Club meetings at the IIC, a weekly intellectual tonic. The Media Foundation's annual Chameli Devi Jain Awards that have helped fine young women mediapersons blossom and grow to their full potential . . .

Working with several NGOs engaged in multifarious activities. Delhi's hectic seminar circuit.

Watching my sons, Vijay and Rahul, go their unconventional ways through online travel journalism, and promoting (marathon) running for health and leisure. Well done.

Do I hear the hinges of my travel box creaking? Will they hold? This could be dangerous. There is, of course, the delicious story of . . . No, No. Nothing more. I must stop . . .

While watching over me patiently as I devoted hours, days and months to writing this book, Jamila would regularly ask, 'How far have you got?' To which my unfailingly response would be, 'Thus far and no further.'

And that is how it always will be. Tomorrow is another day.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

THE GREAT BIHAR FAMINE, 1966-67

The most common sight in South Bihar today is the dole line at feeding centres. It is not a happy sight and must fill the onlooker with pity and shame. In the 20th year of Independence, Famine has revealed the true condition of Bihar—its abject poverty born of agricultural and general economic stagnation, social and educational backwardness, an oppressive caste system, an iniquitous and inefficient land structure, and forms of slavery like *kamauti* and *kamia* that are still extant.

The word in vogue is Famine, (Drought or Scarcity in Delhi). The problem is Poverty, euphemistically described as 'lack of purchasing power'. What is famine? Withered crops and parched fields? A Catholic Father perhaps best described it as 'the empty spaces in the (village) hut'. In an ordinary year, a variety of provisions hang down in earthen pots from the rafters of dimly lit huts—grain, oil, spices, seed. This year the pots and ropes have been put away. The larder is empty. The Famine has revealed homes in which several women share a sari to cover their nakedness in public. It is a common sight to see women and children sweeping the dust to gather fallen grain on railway

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A Note: The excerpts featured in this section (except Appendix III) are from the author's earlier writings.

Excerpted from *Beyond the Famine: An Approach to Regional Planning for Bihar* (Delhi: SuperBazar, 1967).

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sidings and outside grain godowns. It comes as a shock to learn that many people traditionally live on mahua, mango, jamun and other fruit kernels, roots and bark for certain periods in the year, every year. They have nothing else. Nature, not man, provides.

Famine has been controlled and contained by timely relief through official and voluntary agencies . . . (Millions are being fed.) The affected population is also being cared for in other ways: with clothes and blankets, medical aid, multivite tablets and the provision of drinking water. In a 'normal year' these people hover on the breadline. They are beyond the pale, nobody's concern. They starve. In a famine year, they eat. Their health is better and the children are gaining weight. For them this is truly a blessed year. This is the deep irony, the grim tragedy of the situation.

*

The allegation of 'forced' conversions by foreign Christian missionaries, especially in the tribal areas, should form part of the study. There have been conversions in the past but these are more the result of earlier work and preparation than of any sudden coercion or the product of famine assistance with 'strings'. It is possible that an individual missionary or two might have given cause for offence by some thoughtless word or deed. But the phenomenon of mass conversion so often cited proves nothing. Mass action is consistent with tribal behaviour and at least one allegation of mass conversion has on inquiry proved to be the result of a non-Christian boy marrying a Christian girl in a tribal village. The issue was debated by the elders and a collective decision taken. However, the real point is that Christian missionaries have been the only source of medical care, education and general assistance and comfort to remote, backward and neglected tribal communities for years. They are there this year and they will be there next year and the year after. These people are 'friends'; most others who have come to give relief this year are 'strangers', even politicians. Conversion is no crime under the Constitution, though what is wrong about it in some cases is the conscious or unconscious social and cultural 'denationalisation' that follows. Forced conversions would be reprehensible. But perhaps more disturbing, and something that calls for greater soul-searching, is the fact of long years of neglect. Can we afford to let this continue?

The answer to famine and poverty lie in fashioning a long-term development programme of farm renewal based on honest agrarian reform (including bhoodan), utilisation of Bihar's abundant groundwater resources, and provision of modern inputs and credit. This would require that the ravages of the permanent settlement, the absence of accurate or complete records of rights and the crushing disabilities of *bataidari* or the crop-sharing system be addressed.

The hard fact is that in the rural Establishment, the landlord-kulak element is well entrenched in all the political parties: Congress, Communist, Swatantra, the lot. And all these parties still follow the very muddle-headed political arithmetic of counting votes not by simple numbers but by the influence of money and caste.

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The obvious answer to Naxalbari is to enforce the land legislation that already exists or to legislate afresh to cure any defects in law. This seems difficult only because no serious thought has ever been bestowed on the problem or a plan of action evolved. Obviously, any Party that can win the support of small tenants and the landless will do all right politically once the initial shouting is over. The first step must be to concentrate enough staff, money and supervisory personnel in one or two problem districts to compile an accurate and complete record of rights and then position other staff, launch a publicity and educational campaign, and provide free legal aid to enforce these (and other already legislated) rights.

*

The Famine has been a revelation, a trial, a shame; but also an opportunity and an awakening. It has transformed some of the inertia of the past into energy. This energy is a potential that must be harnessed for all time and not be allowed to dissipate as after Independence and after the Chinese attack and the conflict with Pakistan. Soon the new crop will come and the Famine will be a thing of the past, a landmark, a bitter memory. But there can be no 'back to normal'. Bihar must move on, progress and struggle 'to wipe the tear from every eye', so that Poverty, not just Famine, is defeated.

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Appendix II

A CALL FOR ACTION

If the country is adrift and the Government rudderless, it is because there has been a failure of leadership. The Prime Minister has no programme, no world view, no grand design. Thus, bereft of a frame, she has merely reacted to events and failed to shape them. This has been her tragedy. She lacks economic and administrative experience. Nevertheless she has a certain political instinct and charisma which would have been the greater asset if harnessed to a larger purpose. She has a mandate but no mission.

From 1966 until 1969 or even 1971, she was in office but not in power. Hence the halting and one-step-at-a-time, let-well-alone approach. She came to power in 1971-72 with a great election victory and the dazzling success of the liberation of Bangladesh and the war with Pakistan. But once again she failed to relate this to any larger long-term objective of reconstructing India or the sub-continent. The greater the success, the greater the bewilderment over what to do. Having emblazoned 'garibi hatao' on her standard she did not conceptualise it and could not therefore carry it forward. Hence the tendency to mark time till events caught up to create an even greater sense of insecurity and uncertainty. If earlier inaction proceeded from lack of power, subsequent inaction has stemmed from fear of losing power.

Mrs Gandhi's tenure in office has been marked by tactical successes and strategic failures. Reacting purely politically, and with an instinct of self-preservation, she achieved a series of political breakthroughs in bank nationalisation, the 1969 Presidential election, the Congress split, the 1971 and 1972 elections, the 1971 war. But on each occasion she was unable to ride the crest of the wave. Momentum was lost and the opportunity for bold action and structural change was missed every time.

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From 'The Hour of Decision'. The *Hindustan Times*, 24 March 1974.

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Ever since, Mrs Gandhi has felt it inadvisable to trust anyone or any one group of advisers completely and has preferred to be guided by her own intuition . . . there has been a tendency to rest on slogans that have not been translated into purposeful programmes. Most policies have been random shots, unrelated, unsupported and, sometimes, mutually contradictory. The result has been gimmickry, policy inconsistency and confusion, failure of implementation and general uncertainty. A high degree of centralisation at party and governmental levels has gradually dried up the roots of initiative elsewhere. For this the Prime Minister is largely, though not solely, to blame. Her political colleagues too have also shown an abysmal lack of courage and vision.

There being no larger purpose (everybody) has been reduced to incoherence. . . . Initiative has been at a discount or has been perceived as a rival focus of power and therefore a challenge to be overcome. Potential rivals . . . have been cut to size. This has put a premium on factionalism, and group warfare . . .

The Prime Minister has instinctively and rightly realised that in a developing society in which a large mass of people live at the subsistence level, policies must be oriented towards social justice and egalitarianism. Hence 'socialism', but a borrowed, somewhat old-fashioned and bookish socialism. The perception has been correct, but the content and thrust of an Indian socialism has not been thought through or properly structured, and the implementation of ad hoc measures has gone awry. '*Garibi hatao*' is an unexceptionable and, indeed, a highly evocative slogan, and who will disagree with it? The question is how? The idea has to be translated into a series of interrelated policies and programmes, and organisations and personnel developed to deliver these programmes. This has not been done . . .

One has only to recall the thundering rhetoric of Congress resolutions repeated year after year without the slightest action, to know how hollow they sound: the time-bound programmes, the determination to put this, that and the other 'on a war footing', the stirring calls to 'socialism'. All empty words. Take land reform, which is a far bigger and more important concept than a fussy emphasis on ceilings. Few programmes are more fundamental to rural transformation. And possibly on none other has there been a greater, more studied or callous betrayal . . .

Radical rhetoric has become an affectation, a game, another gimmick, a promise of jam tomorrow while inflation, corruption and economic stagnation take the bread out of people's mouths today . . .

All along the line, power has become purpose, almost an end in itself. Everything has been politicised—the unions, education, the administration, et al. And politics has come to mean money. More than unnecessary controls, shortages and penal tax rates that breed evasion, political money has become the most potent engine of black money, corruption and demoralisation. There has been inflation. But the rate of inflation in the domain of political money has been higher than anywhere else, with its 'velocity of corruption' gaining acceleration.

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The possibly well-intentioned but foolish legislation adopted some years ago banning political donations by companies has made all contributions sought by or offered to political parties black money by definition. And so an enormous web of illicit money transactions, *sub rosa* obligations, fund raisers and contact men has enmeshed the system. Every proclaimed policy has been defeated and corrupted by political money; for the giver has been placed both above the policy and the law and been able to purchase title to mulct the exchequer or the citizen or both to recompense himself many times over for his contribution to party funds. Not all these funds reach the Party. Much stays in various pockets en route. Hoarding, profiteering and influence peddling has been the murky fall out of this corrupting process. The citizen is thus subject to a parallel tax system which finances a growing parallel economy.

Over time this has meant a widening distance between policy and practice, with the growing pool of black money and 'influence' becoming an autonomous system within the system, above the law, above the shortages and privations afflicting the common man, and all this with political protection. All parties collect money. But none has done so on so large a scale or so systematically as the Congress party . . .

The obverse of political/black money and the pursuit of political power and ostentatious consumption that goes with it, is violence, indiscipline and a breakdown of social responsibility . . . Those who cannot steal money, steal time. Production and productivity have declined while overtime has grown. With the raising of the minimum bonus . . . to 8.33 per cent, without any corresponding increase in productivity, large numbers of people are being paid for 13 months a year. Can they be blamed when they witness the loot at the top?

With unemployment, corruption and moral rot staring them in the face, student indiscipline can be no surprise. There is no purpose to higher education for many students (except) as a passport for employment. And so, as people must live, they insist on acquiring that passport at the point of a knife if necessary. Learning is secondary . . .

The unions have been politicised. The universities have been politicised. Social values have been debased and social discipline has been sadly eroded. Populism betrayed has fanned more anger. And so the endless series of mindless *bandhs, hartals, gheraos*, wildcat strikes, go-slow and other agitations, so many self-inflicted injuries The erosion of political values and democratic norms threatens the legitimacy of the political system, legislative majorities notwithstanding.

It is every man for himself or every little interest group for itself, and the devil take the hindmost. In this predicament, is it any wonder that parochialism, factionalism, linguism, regionalism, communalism, casteism, everything other than patriotism, grows . . .

It is this system that the Prime Minister must repudiate. She has no need to run the party machine or remain in power this way. Nor can she afford to have various dubious and corrupt people around her. They must go . . . Mrs Gandhi

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could still prove to be the right person to lead the government, preferably a national government ... This is her last chance. Otherwise, even within six or eight months it might be too late.

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Appendix III

POEMS OF THE EMERGENCY

A People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) bulletin devoted an issue to the 'Emergency Remembered'. It reproduced some poems of the time, such as these.

A POETRY READING IS ARRANGED

A poet invited to read his poem
requested they should not be taped.
His request alarmed me. What if
birds suspend their singing because
their voices are recorded or streams
cease their flowing when their babbling
is enscrolled. Is our respiration rate
put on tape? Shall I have to decide not
to love lest our kisses and caresses are
taped and sent wherever it is tapes are sent?

—Samur Anowar
Translated from Bengali by Lila Ray

THE BLACK ORDINANCE II

Hear! Hear! Hear
the black ordinance
of the Durga of Delhi!
Water shall not flow!
The sun and moon shall not shine!
The birds shall not sing!
Friends, my friends, just disappeared
behind bars,
while the prison walls stood with sealed lips.

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The stars of the black sky
knew the truth.
But they were afraid!
India, my India
has become a kingdom of darkness
with widows, orphans
and those who have lost their lovers.
Silence
has frozen into a song
that burns
in the dark bosoms of dark people.

—G. Nagaraj Mullur
Translated from Kannada by Chandrashekhar Patil

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Appendix IV

A NEW TRYST WITH DESTINY

Forty-four years ago, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of India's tryst with destiny. We did not keep that assignation. Today, Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh may have put the country on the path to a new tryst. This time we must not fail. The danger is from Yesterday's Men, backwoodsmen who lurk at every turn, apt to thwart Tomorrow's Men anxious to seize the future ...

Rao and even Singh have hopefully only tactically nailed the Nehruvian banner to their mast. In his concluding remarks to the CPSU Central Committee Plenum in Moscow on July 27 (1991), Gorbachev declared that the Party's Communist model had suffered a 'strategic defeat necessitating a drastic change in its view on socialism. This may well be said of the Nehruvian model without in any way meaning to or in fact denigrating Nehru. Despite his many tragic mistakes which have yet to be more honestly and frankly discussed, he was a great and good man for his time. But that time was yesterday and even towards the end of that period his doctrines had begun to falter and now, certainly, belong to history. The Fabian Socialism he cherished was already outdated in the 1950s. Non-alignment has been hugely irrelevant for some time ... Some of Nehru's social policies were flawed with the failure to give elementary education, primary health, family planning, language policy and Fraternity the importance they deserved. Secularism had been allowed to degenerate into equal respect for everybody's communalism. Much more was disappointing; but there was also much that was good. But the Nehruvian era is long over. Learn from it. Do not imitate it ...

Some of these judgments may appear harsh ... but it is necessary to look at reality. When the late President Truman enunciated his Four Freedoms—from want, fear, hunger and disease—Bob Hope proclaimed a fifth freedom, Freedom from Humbug. India needs this Fifth Freedom ...

From 'Another Tryst with Destiny'. *The Indian Express.*

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Exclamations of horror at the departure from Nehruvian socialism at the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF and their Western market-mentors are a Pavlovian reflex. None will disagree that India has considerable economic achievements to its credit and not everything is out of joint. But only the blind will say that India's progress has been commensurate with its needs and, more to the point, its potential or its investments. Every rupee spent has yielded less than 50 paise in return. Corruption, incompetence and featherbedding are rampant. Look around the globe and in every region there are countries that started way behind India, and later, but have today drawn abreast or are far ahead ... The structural reform that has been initiated is a package to which more elements must be added in phases ... so that a major overhaul is operationalised and completed within two or three years. This must include reforms in the area of decision making and administrative procedures; in labour relations so that trade unions do not remain enemies of employment, growth, innovation and productivity, being content to protect a few high wage islands at great cost; the khadi and village industries sector which must be transformed from a stagnant 'moral' concept into a vibrant economic engine; agrarian relations, which have to go beyond the cosmetics of ceiling laws ... to consolidation, tenancy reform and other more meaningful farm or farm-related systems; modernisation and diversification of agriculture so as to get out of the low-yield, high-cost trap in which Indian farming finds itself; rational pricing policies for power, irrigation and much else, including education, (where kindergarten fees are prohibitive while the highest levels of education are virtually free on the basis of huge, unrequited subsidies); a sensible urbanisation and housing policy; a mass employment strategy based on conscription and a national service corps; and fashioning a science and technology policy ...

Structural reforms are equally necessary in the areas of external affairs and defence, political relations, and social and cultural policy ... 'Augmentation' of national defence must come from better conduct of foreign relations. Indian foreign policy is effete and unable to comprehend, let alone deliver, what India needs—neighbourhood peace and regional cooperation in a world groping towards a new international order. India's (regionally) hegemonistic, defence-led foreign policy of the past decade and more, based on fear that the 'foreign hand' might thwart the country's manifest destiny, has been a disaster. Foolish meddling in Sri Lanka has set South India aflame and the fact that a peace-keeping force went to war shows the extent to which things were stood on their head.

Good neighbourhood relations are imperative and a settlement with Pakistan most important of all. The time is ripe for a bold initiative on Kashmir that gives satisfaction to Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, J&K, POK, Pakistan and India. This is realisable. Few Prime Ministers of India have looked at a map of the sub-continent since 1948. If they did they would discover that Northeast India is virtually landlocked and cannot be (adequately) defended or developed except in cooperation with Bangladesh which controls its arteries of communication

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and constitutes its market. This obvious geo-political imperative has never entered the Indian policy calculus. The signature of an Indian Prime Minister (actually two) on an international boundary treaty with East Pakistan/Bangladesh has been crudely dishonoured over Tin Bigha for 17 (actually 33) years while West Bengal politicians play their absurd little games and a bemused Delhi keeps clucking and tut-tutting in a craven apologia ... On harnessing the Ganga-Brahmaputra waters, India has been pettifogging in its attitude towards Bangladesh and Nepal to its own great disadvantage ...

SAARC has to be resurrected, and India alone can do that ... The thoroughly unprincipled and wholly unproductive cold-shouldering of Israel must end as, without that, India is totally irrelevant in West Asia, a region of great importance to it, and is taken for granted by the Arabs ... (This) would imply no value judgment with regard to the merits of Israel's stance on West Asian issues. Finally, the fledgling National Security Council should be reconstituted and restructured so that it provides a meaningful forum for assessing security threats and perceptions and evolves national perspectives.

In many ways, the larger security threat to India today comes from within, with political, economic and social discontents threatening to explode if they have not done so already. The AK-47 has brought about a tremendous qualitative change in the nature of violence. The AK-47 is to domestic law and order concerns what the nuclear bomb and satellites were to international relations. Central to any political restructuring is a drastic reform of Centre-state relations (reference the Sarkaria Commission), the activation of a purposeful Inter-State Council that could handle a whole host of issues before they reach flash point, and implementation of the critical, (not peripheral) recommendations of the National Police Commission, with concurrent reforms in the intelligence, criminal justice and prison systems. Studied recommendations on all of these and a package of electoral reforms are available and need to be taken out of the pigeon-holes in which they have been left to languish for years.

Concurrently, Indian democracy has to be made far more participative and open through implementation of panchayati raj for governance and development, promoting freedom of information by rolling back official secrecy, and by using broadcasting as a creative tool for education, dialogue and accountability instead of robbing it of initiative and credibility as at present ...

Social restructuring could usefully start with looking at the 1991 Census and its abysmal social indices ... There has also to be a serious review of the mistaken notion that tribal India, increasingly in ferment, must be preserved in pristine purity. This latter-day theory of the noble savage smacks of a paternalistic arrogance that many will find unacceptable. And environmental policies that thwart development and the larger good in space and time for some seeming limited protectionism is equally doomed to failure. Runaway population growth and poverty are destroying the environment and setting in motion huge streams of distress migration. Not to correct this fast is to mortgage the environment.

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There is bound to be a good deal of friction at the interface of different upwardly mobile social groups during the difficult transition of a very diverse society through various stages of development and change. Hence the need for an independent human rights commission to hold the balance and steer the country though this delicate passage . . .

The Congress Party has some prospect of restoring its old élan by holding the middle ground, provided it is prepared to jettison the adventurers who have muscled their way into its ranks. Sonia Gandhi's entering the lists could trigger forces of realignment. The Janata Dal and National Front are facing internal strains that could soon reach breaking point. The Left consists of a strange agglomeration of ageing Marxist, Trotskyite and Maoist throwbacks mouthing slogans of yesteryear. It remains to be seen whether the younger cadres and their socialist colleagues are able to evolve a more relevant New Left that might help mould the future. The BJP, dizzy with success, is still to descend to earth. Its moment of truth may not be too far away when it discovers that the 16th century and the 21st do not easily mix and that history moves forward, not back. There are some good people and moderate elements in the party. Unless they take over, the BJP could find itself out on a limb or pushed into chauvinistic right extremism which would divide the nation. The task before India . . . is to move towards building a new national coalition and a new national consensus based on the principles set out in the Preamble to the Constitution, which says all that a great social democratic nation needs to say and be.

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Appendix V

INFORMATION AS DEFENCE

The information age has annihilated time and space. The revolution in military affairs has likewise changed the nature of war, which has now acquired altogether new dimensions. Winning hearts and minds has become as important as gaining military dominance. Nor can national and international opinion be ignored except at great cost in an increasingly democratic and globalising world.

'Fronts', trenches and positional warfare have given way to information war, proxy wars, low intensity conflict, guerrilla insurrection and cross-border terrorism. The nature of conventional war has changed and internal security has shaded into 'war'. At the same time, the concept of national security has come to be seen as embracing more than 'war' or 'defence'. It includes public order, food and energy security, environmental protection, public health, not excluding insurance against biological and chemical warfare, water supply, technological and industrial capability and disaster management.

This new and continually evolving situation calls for a completely new mode of real time information. The current Defence PR establishment caters, at best, for the wars of yesteryear. Even so, it lacks the charter, means and interface to deliver. The reorganisation of Higher Defence Management in a nuclearised environment and the embodiment of a wider security concept in the mandate of the recently established National Security Council must impel a corresponding reorganisation of the Defence/National Security Information apparatus.

The present concept and structure of Defence information is outmoded and limited. In a world witness to phenomenal technological change and rising political and social consciousness there is increasing demand for greater

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Paraphrased from 'Information as Defence: Media Relations in an Instant World'.

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transparency and accountability. In this situation, the Indian Defence Information system has metaphorically yet to graduate much beyond the requirements of an era of advanced trench warfare.

This Report outlines the contours of a new structure for Defence information, addresses present needs and seeks to anticipate the future. It does so, on the basis of a philosophy of information characterised by access, speed and credibility, eschewing propaganda. It is not for nothing that the country's motto is Satyameva Jayate.

The proposed structure is fashioned to serve two audiences. The public, national and international, including Parliament constitute the external audience. No less relevant is the other, internal audience comprising the armed/security forces, Defence employees and their dependents and the executive limbs of government, Central and State. The media is the primary means of reaching out to the public. It is central to the effort and must be treated as a partner and not seen as an adversary that is best kept at a distance. But the Ministry of Defence (MOD) must also develop means of direct communications through its own websites, publications and audio-visual productions.

The establishment of a high-powered Defence Information Directorate (DID) is recommended in place of the present anaemic Directorate of Defence Public Relations. This should be under a senior spokesperson of Joint Secretary or two-star rank officer, assisted by a team of inter-Service and specialist civil officers constituting an informal board of management. The DID's charter, personnel profile and required infrastructure are set out. The Spokesperson and other officials may be selected in-house or brought in on contract through lateral entry. Professional competence and training are essential. The Headquarters organisation will be at the apex of a network going down to field formations and Service/Defence establishments for speedy collation and dissemination of information and to meet operational requirements in time of war, low-intensity conflict and other emergencies.

A strong institutionalised interface with nodal information centres in the Government such as MEA, MHA, the PIB and PMO, with channels to the para-military organisations, the National Security Council Secretariat, the Intelligence agencies, and concerned state governments is also recommended. Information planning and coordination cannot be left to chance and the Government must speak with one voice.

Reorganisation of Defence Information on the lines suggested must be seen as complementary to the reorganisation of the Higher Defence Management system within MOD on the principles of integration and jointness . . .

The new structure may be allowed to 'grow' and be implemented in phases. However, delay should be avoided as synergy will be lost if all the proposed elements are not put in place. The additional financial burden will be modest and should not be grudged. Information is central to governance, defence preparedness and national mobilisation.

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(The information age) transcends national borders, old-fashioned deadlines and national privacy. If a nation does not inform its people, others will—and will angle the information their way. News, information and images have become real time events with the growth and democratisation of ever more sophisticated and convergent multi-media systems straddling the globe and penetrating the remotest regions. At the same time, democratic trends and the rise of civil society are compelling change from a framework of official secrecy, with information doled out on the basis of judgments of the people's need to know, such as prevails in India, to a regime of the people's inherent right to know, backed by freedom of information legislation. India must move in this direction.

Information is power. The uninformed and misinformed are vulnerable, confused and disorganised. Modern wars and security challenges are no longer confined to uniformed armies and battlefronts. They are everywhere and have increasingly to be fought 'in the minds of men' (as UNESCO put it more than half a century ago). Perceptions define the reality that must be confronted. Hence national preparedness calls for a well-informed society that comprehends and supports public policy, can confront security challenges with maturity and sustain high morale.

*

Security oftentimes lies in parting with rather than withholding information . . . It is however essential strictly to separate Defence Information and all activities of DID from any agency associated with psychological warfare. The latter stands in a class apart. DID's credibility must not be undermined by association with anything to do with propaganda or information warfare.

I recommended an integrated information structure that would anticipate future needs, rather than a parallel civil and military information system. Being a nuclear weapons state in a nuclear environment introduced a vital new compulsion for information integration. I cited Deng Xioping's adage that it does not matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice. Obviously, a single individual cannot handle a large and complex system with multifarious demands on it. This would require collegial action and a mix of policy, and operational, media and technical expertise.

I was impressed with the US system of key information spokesmen in the White House, Pentagon, State Department, Intelligence agencies, Theatre Commands and others, on an as-and-when basis, conferring every day through a tele-conference call to exchange data and ensure that everybody sang from the same music sheet. The report discussed the nature and management of vertical links up and down the information chain from field office to headquarters, interfaces with Prasar Bharati and other media, the publication of general and specialised journals, the creation of a defence information website under a trained and innovative webmaster, a system for bringing to notice grievances and human rights issues, findings and awards, disaster management operations, welfare and sadbhavana programmes, matters relating to defence R&D and

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defence production and, last but not least, transparency in the procurement policy and bidding and evaluation processes.

In conclusion, I argued that the existing system had seen its day. India was now steadily emerging as a major regional and even global actor with its security interests going far beyond earlier narrow preoccupations. Information must therefore assume a strategic dimension in responding to these concerns. There was a final note of advice. Defence reorganisation had been long debated but reform had proved elusive. I saw this as a trap and pleaded for bold action that would anticipate and shape the future.

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EDWARD M. KENNEDY
MASSACHUSETTS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

New Delhi, August 16, 1971

Dear Mr. Verghese:

Just a short note to let you know how much I appreciated the opportunity to get together with you during my recent visit to Delhi.

I shall not soon forget the warm welcome I received here, and I am extremely hopeful we can channel our mutual concern for the plight of the refugees from East Bengal into an effort that will bring peace and relief to a troubled area.

Again, many thanks and best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

Ted Kennedy

Edward M. Kennedy

My thanks -

Mr. George Verghese
Editor-in-Chief
The Hindustan Times
Connaught Place
New Delhi

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TATA INDUSTRIES Private LIMITED
Bombay House, Homi Mody Street,
Fort, Bombay 400023

CHAIRMAN'S OFFICE

PERSONAL

30th October, 1974

Dear Jaya,

I am sorry for the delay in acknowledging your letter of September 25, enclosing copies of some of your recent writings on the population problem, which I have read with interest. For your personal information, I am enclosing a copy of a letter I have just written to Dr. Karan Singh.

I have been dismayed at the news of the attempt to oust you from The Hindustan Times, and I would like you to know that my colleagues and I feel very strongly on the subject and hope a solution satisfactory to you will emerge.

Yours sincerely,

(J. R. D. Tata)

Encl:

Mr. B. G. Verghese,
NEW DELHI.

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"On 8 February 1967, an election rally the PM addressed in Bhubaneshwar was stoned... The PM had concluded and the chief minister, Biju Patnaik, was on his feet when the heckling intensified. Mrs G took the mike and asked: 'Will you vote for people who throw stones and engage in disruption?' The crowd cheered, but just then she was hit by a rock...The medical examination established a bruised upper lip, which was by now considerably swollen, and a 'minute crack on the nasal spine, without displacement'. I said I was sorry she was hurt.

'I've got a long nose, I know, but I don't want a crooked one. I'm not hurt, George. My vanity is hurt!' she responded.'

On the return flight to Delhi, her face partially veiled to hide the bruise, she told the newsmen accompanying her, eyes twinkling, 'So now you know why *purdah-nishin* ladies veiled themselves: so that no one should know if they had been fighting with their husbands!' She had guts and a sense of humour."

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